The Peat Fire Flame

Alasdair Alpin MacGregor

Oss 317

THIS is a comprehensive collection of the best folk-tales of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Many of these tales have been collected orally by the author and appear now in print for the first time. In the outlying parts of the Hebrides where only Gaelic is spoken by the older inhabitants these tales could only be collected by one who is familiar with the language, and the Author is well qualified for the task he has undertaken. He has been a collector all his life and, Highland born, familiar with Gaelic since he could speak. With the passing years the sources for oral collection of these old tales are becoming fewer and less accessible and as there has been a growing interest in Celtic literature and Celtic music in recent years the time would seem ripe for a new one-volume collection of folk-tales. The book is illustrated with reproductions from the Author's own photographs.

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THE PEAT-FIRE FLAME

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SUMMER DAYS AMONG THE WESTERN ISLES.
HEBRIDEAN SEA PIECES.
ETC., ETC.

THE PEAT-FIRE FLAME

FOLK-TALES AND TRADITIONS OF THE HIGHLANDS & ISLANDS

By

ALASDAIR ALPIN MACGREGOR

(Author of *Summer Days among the Western Isles; Somewhere in Scotland; &c.*)

With 56 Illustrations
from Photographs
by the Author.

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To the Elusive
KENNETH MACLEOD,
"The Most Distinguished Faery of Modern Times,"
In Recollection of His Esteem for
the Brownie dwelling on Cara,
and of the small hours spent over
the Manse fire
at Gigha,
In the Kingdom of the Isles.

PREFACE

THE purport of this volume is to set forth a series of Folk-tales and Traditions in a form in which they may make a popular appeal, and, incidentally, be saved from oblivion. With the science of Folk-tales I have not concerned myself: nor have I included tales and traditions that might be ascribed to a period regarded as mythological. But I have endeavoured to make my collection and selection as representative as possible.

I am well aware that this work may lay itself open to the criticism that certain chapters lack easy continuity, and that much of the material is too compendious and detached; but this is almost unavoidable where, for purposes of clarity and ready reference, an attempt is being made to allow each folk-tale and tradition to stand on its own merits. I hope, however, that compensation for any such defect will be found in the manner in which I have sought to correlate the text and the illustrations.

With the exception of the illustrations showing the Faery Flag, Rory Mòr's Horn, and the Dunvegan Cup, which was given to me many years ago by my friend, the late Canon R. C. MacLeod of MacLeod, all the illustrations are from photographs taken by myself with a 3A Kodak, on Kodak film (chiefly panatomic), and with a sky or a colour filter.

Here and there I have inserted, with minor alterations, some of the folk-tales and traditions to be found in my earlier works. In most cases such inclusions are the result of my own labour and research. However, the great bulk of the volume consists of fresh, unpublished material, much of which has come my way when wandering at various times through the Highlands and Hebrides with a notebook and a camera, and with a ready ear for the traditionary fragments that remain unchronicled, and that to-day are passing so rapidly out of memory.

To the Editor of *Chambers's Journal* I am indebted

for permission to include the chapter on Folk-tales and Traditions of the '15 and the '45, to the Editors of the *Manchester Guardian, S.M.T. Magazine,* and *Passing Show* in respect of most of the material contained in the chapters on the Seal-folk, the Brownie, and the Glaistig; and to my good friend, Walter MacPhail, Editor of the *Edinburgh Evening News,* for odds and ends that have been contributed by me to his paper at varying intervals during the past decade, and that now are appropriately incorporated in this volume.

To Miss Mary Wilson, Black Hill House, Strathtay, I am grateful for two or three Perthshire tales of the Second-Sight and of Ghosts; to Miss M. Wright Craig, Inverness, for several notes on Bell-lore and the like; to my own kinsfolk in the Outer Hebrides for some of the most precious fragments this book contains; and to my late father for the incomparable background of my childhood.

And I would be ungrateful, indeed, were I not to make mention of the hospitality of my leal, open-handed friend, A. B. MacKay, since it was over his generous fireside in Cathcart, Glasgow, during the small hours, that much of the material embodied in the succeeding pages was set down, and gradually fashioned into book-form.

ALASDAIR ALPIN MACGREGOR.

14, PAULTON'S SQUARE,
CHELSEA, S.W., 3.
June, 1937.

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SEA SORROW

(AM BRON MARA)

Ailein, Dhuinn! * I have wept by the tide for thee long,
Where the seal-woman croons her mysterious song;
And watchers are waiting by pale candle-light,
While the lone seagull searches the waves of the night . . .

O, lay me to sleep in a wild, Hebrid sea,
That my last resting-place beside Alan may be—
Where the grey seal still lists for the drip of his oar,
And the lap of his old, empty boat on the shore.

ALASDAIR ALPIN MACGREGOR.

* Literally, O Fair Alan!

CHAPTER I

FAERIES : THEIR PROPENSITIES AND ACTIVITIES

IT may not be known generally that Highland and Hebridean faeries live lives not very dissimilar to those of ordinary mortals, have many of the same pleasures and fears and inhibitions, are practised in many of the same handicrafts, possess livestock, maintain arms for offensive and defensive purposes, are liable to fall victim to the same diseases, and require food, shelter, and clothing. Ordinary humans, who at one time or another have been privileged to visit Faeryland, have assured us on their return that the faeries are engaged in occupations identical with those associated with human activity. Many members of the fraternity, for example, are blacksmiths, and work laboriously at the making of agricultural implements, and of such weapons as faery arrows. They eat : they dance : they make merry. When they are tired, they fall asleep in the ordinary way. Their women-folk spin and weave, milk and churn, grind the grain with querns, cook the food, bake bread, and even sing at their work. When commodities run short, or when they require the use of a utensil which they may not possess, they borrow the same from their faery neighbours, just as do many classes of mankind.

Their dwellings are underground, and are illumined by luminants in everyday use; and their tables are often adorned with vessels of silver and gold. All things about their homes are lustrous and gorgeous. Their clothing, as a rule, is extravagant. Their diet is rich and varied. It consists chiefly of articles meant for human consumption, out of which the faery folk take the *toradh* or substance, leaving for mankind merely the bulk without any food value at all. In addition to the food they acquire from men, they feed on such viands as *brisgean*, the root of the silver-weed, which is ploughed up in great quantities in spring-time, and

in olden days was known as the Seventh Bread. They also have a partiality for the stalks and tops of heather, and for young, fresh heather-shoots. Their milk is the milk of the goat and of the red deer hind; and the milk of ordinary cows spilt in the byre, or between the byre and the house, has been regarded as their perquisite through many centuries. The elle-woman, or female faery, often may be seen on the hills, milking the hinds, just as ordinary, mortal women milk domesticated cows.

Close to the knolls or knowes, which form the faeries' habitations, and are sometimes spoken of as Elf-hillocks, may be found those circles of dark-green grass, known as Faery Rings, or Faery Greens. On these the faeries dance and revel when, on moonlit nights, they emerge from their dwellings underground. Under no circumstances must mortal men essay to cultivate a Faery Green, or permit their livestock to damage or pollute it in any way. Murrain among beasts—the fifth of the dreaded plagues of Egypt in the days of Moses—befell the cattle of a crofter in Caithness, who interfered with a faery knowe; and so serious was the plague that the need-fire had to be employed to stay it. The need-fire, or neid-fire, was the name applied to fire produced by the friction of two pieces of wood. To such fire certain virtues were superstitiously attached in olden times.

The following quotation from Chambers's *Popular Rhymes* describes what may happen when one seeks to till a Faery Green:

> "He wha tills the faeries' green
> Nae luck again shall hae:
> And he wha spills the faeries' ring
> Betide him want and wae,
> For weirdless days and weary nights
> Are his till his deein' day.
> But he wha gaes by the faery ring,
> Nae dule nor pine shall see;
> And he wha cleans the faery ring,
> An easy death shall dee."

Faeryland is ruled by a king—the King of the Faeries. He is assisted in the administration of his court and kingdom

by his wife, who is designated the Queen of the Faeries, or the Queen of Elfin. The prevalence of this belief is shown by all manner of documentary evidence. Among the admissions of the Auldearn witches, when on trial in 1662, is that of Isobel Gowdie. "I was in Downie Hills," Isobel confessed, "and got meat there from the Queen of the Fairies more than I could eat. The queen is brawly clothed in white linen, and in white and brown cloth: the king is a braw man, well favoured and broad-faced. There were plenty of elf bulls rowting (bellowing) and skoyling (squealing) up and down, and affrighted me." [1]

It is said that faeries always come from the west, and that they are able to enter houses, however well protected such houses may be against their invasion. All manner of devices were resorted to in former times—aye, and even at the present day in certain parts of the Highlands and Islands—to counteract their activities. Cattle killed by accidentally falling over cliffs are looked upon as being especially liable to faery influence; and thus a nail was driven into such a victim as soon after the accident as possible, in order to keep the faery folk away from the carcase.

The bannock made with the last pickle of meal at the end of the baking also kept them away, but only when a hole had been pierced in it by the finger, or when it had been placed under a fragment of burning fuel. It was customary, also, to remove the band from the spinning-wheel at bed-time, particularly on Saturday nights, for otherwise the faeries invaded the house and used the wheel after its inmates had retired for the night. The hum of the spinning-wheel frequently was heard during the night in houses where, inadvertently, the band had been left on the wheel; but in the morning no evidences of spinning could be seen anywhere, and the wheel itself was often found in a damaged condition. In Ireland it was usual to remove the band from the wheel in order to frustrate the faeries' predisposition for spoiling the linen.

Then, the last handful of grain reaped at the end of the

[1] Pitcairn's *Criminal Trials*, III, 604.

harvest was made up into what was known as the Harvest Maiden. This figure was suspended somewhere in the farmer's house, to act as a protection against the faeries' wiles until the following harvest, when it was replaced by a new one.

By the same token, sprigs of holly were used for decorative purposes on the last day of the year. And one reason why water-stoups were filled at night and brought into the house was that the faeries might have plenty of liquid with which to slake their thirst, without their having to seek other sources of liquid at the expense of mankind.

Both the Women of Peace, as female faeries were called, and their masculine counterpart, the Men of Peace, according to tradition, lured members of the human race into their subterranean retreats, and regaled them sumptuously. Both, likewise, wore green garments, and were believed to take a spite against ordinary mortals who presumed to wear their colour. Among Highlanders, as doubtless among other peoples, there is a tendency to avoid selecting clothing of a green colour. Indeed, many women of our own day definitely refuse to wear anything that is green, on the ground that it is the colour in which the faeries specialise, and is, therefore, unlucky. Dundee's misfortune at Killiecrankie was attributed by the Highlanders to his having been dressed in green on that fateful occasion. And to this day many of the name of Graham regard this colour as being of evil omen; and on no account will they wear it.

The faeries, moreover, tempted mortals to partake of their food, and to join in their merriment. When ordinary mortals did so, they forfeited their power to remain members of human society, and were tied down irrevocably to observing the constitution governing the affairs of the Men of Peace.

The story is told of a woman who was transported into the secret recesses of the Men of Peace, where she was recognised by one of their number, who claimed to have known her when he himself was an ordinary mortal. This faery apparently retained a modicum of benevolence, since he counselled her to abstain from eating and drinking with

them for a definite space of time, during her retention in faeryland, if she desired her freedom. This advice she took. Thus, when the assigned period had elapsed, she was restored to the society of mortals. The tradition continues that, when afterwards she came to examine the food offered her by the Men of Peace, she found it to consist "only of the refuse of the earth."

From all accounts, the faeries dwelling in the Highlands were not so brazen as their kinsfolk inhabiting the Shetland Isles, since the latter appear to have had no qualms about carrying off young children, even after they had been baptised, meanwhile seeing to it that in their place they substituted something in the nature of a cabbage stalk or two, which they altered into the appearance of the abducted infant. The bereft mother in such circumstances was obliged to bestow upon the substitute the same care and attention as that which she would have bestowed upon her own child. It was firmly believed in the Shetlands that, if she acted otherwise towards the substitute, the Men of Peace would deprive her finally of her child.

Said a Shetland mother to a neighbour, who was condoling with her because of the wasted appearance of the infant on her knee: "This is not my bairn. May the devil rest where my bairn is now!"

The following folk-tales, selected from many that have come my way in recent years, are illustrative of faery life and habit.

Released from Faeryland.

Not so long ago, a woman and her infant son, living at Rahoy, in the Morven district of Argyll, were translated mysteriously to Ben Iadain, a hill in the neighbourhood reputed to have been the domicile of faeries. As the woman herself afterwards explained, they were taken to the Black Door, that being the name then given to the faeries' main entrance to the interior of the hill. Within the hill they encountered a vast throng of people of all ages, among whom was a young lad who approached the woman and bade her not to refuse such food as the faeries might

offer her, but to take it and conceal it in her clothing. He explained to her that he and his mother had been carried hither in like manner, and that neither of them could get away because of his mother's indiscretion in having partaken of the faeries' food, and her bidding him to do likewise.

When the faery-in-chief learnt that the woman refused to consume any of the food supplied to her, he sent a band of his henchman to bring in a certain man's cow. But they returned without the cow, explaining that they could not touch it, since its right knee was resting on the plant known as the dirk grass. He then sent them forth for another cow; but they came back with the news that the milk-maid, on her own confession, had just put an iron shackle on it. A third time the faery henchmen sallied forth for yet another cow; but they learnt to their dismay that this cow had just consumed a quantity of the magical plant called the *mothan*.

That night the woman's husband had a dream, in which the whereabouts of his wife and child were revealed, and in which he was instructed to tie three knots in the silk kerchief his wife wore at her marriage, and take it to the Black Door. Thus equipped, the husband entered the interior of Ben Iadain, and rescued his wife and infant son.

As for the lad, who had warned the woman not to consume any of the food offered her by her captors, he still may be held captive by the faeries, for all we know!

The Faeries of Pennygown.

In a manner not dissimilar to that in which the Brownie of Rothiemurchus took umbrage, as told in a later chapter, the faeries occupying the green hillock near the township of Pennygown, in Mull, abandoned their benevolent activities. For generations people having irksome tasks relied on the help of the Pennygown faeries. Of nights they left by the hillock all sorts of jobs for them to execute—material for spinning and weaving, household utensils to repair, and the like. When they returned to the hillock in the morning, they always found the work done to their satisfaction.

But one night a cantankerous villager left by the hillock a fragment of wood he had picked up on the shore, together with instructions for the faeries that they should make out of it a tall mast for a ship he contemplated building.

"Short life and ill-luck attend the fellow who asked us to do this!" said the faeries, when they examined the fragment of drift-wood, and read the instructions accompanying it.

So displeased were the faeries that the villagers, when they came to the green hillock in the morning, found none of their tasks executed, as heretofore. And never thereafter did the faeries bestow their beneficence on the villagers of Pennygown.

And this brings us to

The Wizard of Reay and his Book of Magic.

A certain Donald MacKay, dwelling in the north of Sutherland, and known in his day as the Wizard of Reay, had a servant, who offended the faeries in a way not unlike that in which the thoughtless villagers of Pennygown forfeited their aid. Among the few tangible possessions Donald prized was a Book of Magic, to which he resorted constantly, and which he promised to lend to a neighbour who, like himself, had a reputation for warlockry. The delivery of the sacred tome he entrusted to a servant, from whom he extracted a solemn undertaking that he would not open it and attempt to read it on the way.

But the way was long; and, as the servant rested on his journey, curiosity overcame him, and he commenced to turn over its leaves. In an instant he found himself encompassed by hundreds of little men, who cried: "Work! Work!" Their insistence that they should be given employment instantly alarmed the servant of the Wizard of Reay, for he soon discovered that he had brought all this trouble upon himself by attempting to peruse his master's Book of Magic. Realising, however, that he had better provide them with some occupation in the hope of appeasing them, he set them to making ropes of the vast expanses of heather that lay around. With incredible rapidity, all the

heather in sight was converted into ropes. Then the Little Men returned to the servant, and again shrieked for work.

The servant now sent them off to the Bay of Tongue, with instructions to fashion ropes out of the sand by the shore. This task they found beyond their powers. Therefore, in wrath they deserted the district, leaving Donald, the Wizard of Reay, to manage as best he could without further aid from an elfin source.

But they say in Sutherland that, though Donald was deprived of the assistance of the faeries, he still retained the power of bringing down rain or hail or snow from the heavens, by the merest wave of his hand.

The Faeries of the Seely Howe.

The readiness with which the faeries took offence is also shown by the following folk-tale connected with Dee-side. When the Laird of Blelack was making preparations to leave home for the Jacobite Wars, he engaged the services of a certain John Farquharson to rid his property of the faeries inhabiting that part of it known as the Seely Howe. Although Farquharson possessed occult powers, and had won a reputation for his having dislodged faeries on previous occasions, he found it impossible to rid the Seely Howe until he had provided its occupants with alternative accommodation. So, he settled them on the Hill o' Fare, near Banchory.

But the faeries took so ill to their new environment that at length they felt constrained to pronounce two curses—one upon Farquharson, and the other on the Laird of Blelack. The curse on the former ran :—

> "While corne and girss grow to the air,
> John Farquharson and his seed shall thrive nae mair."

On the Laird they pronounced the following malediction :—

> "Dool, dool to Blelack,
> And dool to Blelack's heir,
> For driving us from the Seely Howe
> To the cauld Hill o' Fare."

Thereafter, it is said, ill-luck pursued both Farquharson and the Laird of Blelack.

How the Faeries Persecuted Luran.

A little distance above the Ardnamurchan shore, just by the northern end of the Sound of Mull, there is a prominent hillock known as the Charmed Knowe. Here, upon a time, lived a tenant-farmer named Luran, Son of the Dark Man. Owing to some mysterious agency, every morning Luran found one of his cows dead. His suspicions were immediately directed toward the occupants of the Culver—the name given to a brugh forming part of the Charmed Knowe, and said to be the abode of Faery Folk. So Luran decided to keep an eye on his cows for a night or two, in the hope of solving the mystery of their dying. During his first vigil, he saw the Culver open, and a band of faery folk stream forth from it to encompass one of his cows. Forthwith the cow was herded into the Culver; and, according to the Gaelic rendering of this tale, no one was more active at the herding of the cow than was Luran himself. The cow was killed and skinned right duly. Sewn up in the cow's hide was an elfin tailor who, while seated on the top of the brugh, plying his needle as a mortal, was seized by the faeries.

That night the faery festivities were inaugurated when the cow-hide and its elfin content were taken to the door of the Culver, and rolled down the slope in front of it. Luran again took part in this operation, endeavouring by so doing to show the Faery Folk that he neither suspected them for the loss of his cows, nor desired them any ill will.

On the faeries' dining-table stood many precious goblets. These Luran eyed covetously. When he imagined that none of the inhabitants of the Culver was watching him, he stole a glittering goblet, since he regarded his possession of it to be meet compensation for all his dead cows. But the faeries observed his theft; and they lost no time in pursuing him.

> "Not so swift would be Luran,
> But for the hardness of his bread."

the faeries were heard to say one to another during the pursuit. As Luran was on the point of being overtaken, he heard a propitious voice, saying:—

> "Luran, Son of the Black One,
> Get thee among the black stones by the shore."

So Luran made for the shore, and found his way to safety by scrambling home among the rocks below high-tide mark, since neither ghost nor elf can penetrate seaward beyond the contour reached by the highest tide. And, when scrambling home, Luran could hear the cries of a person whom the faeries appeared to be beating, and whom he believed to be the very one who had advised him to make for the black stones below high-tide mark. In the morning there was found at the base of the Culver a dead cow, in the right shoulder of which was discovered a needle, just as Luran had predicted to those who told him of its situation.

The faeries' persecution of Luran was not yet at an end, however. While he was on his way to Inveraray by boat some time later, carrying with him the faery cup he had taken from the Culver, he was spirited away by some mysterious power. And that was the last that human eye ever saw of Luran and his cup.

The folk-lore of Tiree describes Luran's encounter with the faeries somewhat differently. Luran entered a brugh, wherein he found the faeries all asleep. On the fire was a large copper kettle, which he sought to carry away with him. In so doing, the kettle accidentally banged against the doorway of the brugh; and the noise it made woke the faeries, sixteen of whom now set out in pursuit of him. "Make for the black stones on the shore," Luran heard someone say. So, he straightway made for the shore, and escaped with the faery kettle.

A Faery Tale of Sandray.

The exploits of Luran recall another folk-tale, describing how the wife of a herd on the Island of Sandray, in the Outer Hebrides, made friends with a Woman of Peace, who came to borrow her kettle. This Banshee, or Woman

of Peace, lived in a faery knoll not far off; and she would be seeking the kettle every day. Not a word did she utter when she came to borrow the kettle. It was her wont to enter the house silently, and appropriate the utensil without any explanation or ado. As she was in the act of quitting the house, the herd's wife would be saying to her :

"A smith is able to make
Cold iron hot with coal :
The due of the kettle is bones,
And to bring it back again whole."

Under the spell of this rhyme, the kettle was sure to return to its owner before daybreak.

Every day the Woman of Peace came back with the kettle filled with juicy bones. And, on a day that there was, the herd's wife, before leaving for Castlebay on an errand, instructed her goodman to tell the Banshee, should she come for the kettle in her absence, whither she had gone.

"Surely it's myself that will tell her," replied the herd. Now, he happened to be spinning a heather rope at the gable-end of his cottage when he saw the Woman of Peace approaching; and he took fear at the sight of her, fled into the house, shut the door, and refused to open it to her. Determined not to be outwitted, the Banshee climbed up to the hole that was in the roof of the house, just above the fire. Thereupon the kettle gave two jumps, and then flew out by the hole in the roof.

When the herd's wife returned from Castlebay, she asked her husband where was the kettle. And he confessed to her how he had closed the door in the face of the Woman of Peace, and how petrified with fear he was when the kettle began to jump on the hearthstone, and ultimately disappeared through the hole that was in the roof above the fire.

Night came; but with the kettle the Woman of Peace returned not. Having scolded her husband for his childish conduct, the goodwife of Sandray hastened away to the faery brugh, where she found the kettle awaiting her. On lifting it, she discovered it to be heavy with the remnants

of the faeries' evening meal. And, as she was making off with it, she heard a voice saying:

> "Silent wife, silent wife,
> That came on us from the land of chase,
> Thou man on the surface of the Brugh,
> Loose the Black, and slip the Fierce."

No distance had she travelled with the kettle before two angry dogs came bounding after her. And she thrust her hand into the kettle, and threw out to them a quarter of what it contained. But the dogs followed on; and, ere she arrived home, she had given them the entire contents of the kettle in her endeavour to pacify them.

Jealous, to be sure, were the dogs of the township of Sandray when they perceived that the herd's wife was feeding the Dogs of Peace.

But never again came the Banshee to seek the kettle.

And this reminds me of another faery tale told of Pabbay, the Island lying between Sandray and Mingulay.

A Faery's Desire.

Came a famishing Woman of Peace to the door of a man living on Pabbay; "and she had the hunger of motherhood on her." Food she was given; and there she tarried the night. Turning to her host as she was leaving on the morrow, she said: "The desire is with me that hereafter none of the people of this Island may go in childbed."

And from that moment—so the story has it—no one dwelling on Pabbay ever died in childbed.

The Faery Cup of Raasay.

Luran was not the only one to make off with a faery cup. A certain Ewen chanced to pass by a faery establishment on the Island of Raasay, when its indwellers were making merry within. They intercepted Ewen in his passing, and persuaded him to enter and join in their revelry. Ewen was beside himself when the faeries put a faery drinking-cup in his hand, and proceeded to drink to his wellbeing.

But the temptation was too great for him; and he dashed off with the cup before he had as much as tasted its content. The faeries immediately unleashed one of their dogs, and sent it forth in pursuit of Ewen. But Ewen outran the dog; and he actually deponed to having heard the faeries recall their dog with *"Farbhainn! Farbhainn!"*

It is said that this cup remained for centuries in the possession of the MacLeods of Raasay, who were a branch of the ancient and hapless MacLeods of Lewis.

Red Donald of the Faeries.

The herd at the Spittal, above Dalnacardoch, used to see red faeries when a boy, they say; but that was in the days before General Wade built his military road through this wild countryside. On one occasion the herd was transferred by mysterious agency during the night to the house of his father, in Rannoch, several miles away. In the morning, however, despite the fact that the door and windows were bolted and snibbed, he was found dozing before the smouldering peat-fire in his own home at the Spittal. And so the members of his household surmised that he must have entered by the chimney.

And ever after that episode the herd at the Spittal was known as Red Donald of the Faeries.

Dancing in Faeryland.

Not very long ago (so I was assured recently in the Highlands, at any rate!), two young men were returning in the small hours from New Year festivities at Ferintosh, each of them carrying on his shoulder a small cask of whisky. They came to a spot at which they heard laughter and merriment and the strains of music, for which there appeared to be no accounting. On proceeding to investigate matters, they beheld a doorway open in a mound by the roadside, beyond which lay a large apartment brightly illumined, on the floor of which danced an inordinate number of wee people. They both entered; and one of them, impatient to be at the dancing too, hastened on to the

floor without as much as depositing his cask. His companion, more suspicious of his surroundings, stuck a pin in the door-post as he entered, so as to permit of his leaving whenever he felt inclined.

Toward dawn he decided to quit the scene of merriment, taking with him his cask of whisky. But his companion, perforce, was obliged to dance on indefinitely. A twelve-month later he returned to the scene in the hope of being able to rescue his friend. There, to be sure, he found him, completely enchanted, dancing and dancing and dancing, with the cask of whisky on his shoulder, and resentful of any suggestion that he should be escorted home until he had finished the reel then in progress.

When, eventually, his friend was able to persuade the Little Folk to release him from his enchantment, and once more brought him into the daylight, it was observed that he had danced himself away to mere skin and bone. Here was a man under faery spell, who, like Rip Van Winkle and Mary Rose, was unconscious of the lapse of time during his enchantment, since in Faeryland a year is as a day!

A Host of Faeries.

Mention of the cask of whisky reminds one of a glen in Balloch that long was regarded as the abode of a tribe of faeries. To this day the old folks of Loch Lomondside recite the tale that tells of how a certain Donald MacGregor was waylaid while returning one autumn evening to his croft in the Pass of Balmaha. Donald had been visiting some old cronies, who lived by the Gareloch. Their generosity did not end at giving him as much whisky as he could carry away inwardly: it went the length of presenting him with a full keg on his departure. Fearful was Donald lest, on his way back to Balmaha, he should meet anyone who would insist on being "treated," or who possibly might wrest from him his precious keg. So, stealthily he crept through the Lennox, keeping as far as possible from the beaten track to Balmaha.

In course of time he arrived in a small glen near Balloch. There he sat down to take a nip or two—*in camera,* as *he*

thought—and fell asleep. He was not long in the land of dreams when singing and dancing and the scurrying of little feet rudely awakened him to the grim reality that he had fallen asleep in a faery dene. Before him stood a giant tree, into the base of which led a doorway thronged with little men and little women, who were attired in blue-bell tunics and green, broad-rimmed hats. In a trice a score of them surrounded him, and proceeded to share out the content of his keg. When the the keg had been drained to the lees, the Little Folk tripped back through the doorway; and the magic tree vanished. In a state of dire confusion, Donald arose and fled to the Endrick as quickly as mere legs could bear him. Over that river he leapt in a manner never before nor since witnessed. But it was not until some day afterwards that, at a *ceilidh* round his own fireside in the Pass of Balmaha, he came to his senses, and recounted to his family the strange way in which he had been deprived of his keg of whisky.

The Faery Dyers.

In the valley between Ben Ime and Ben Vane, the tributary of the Inveruglas Water, known as Allt Coire Grogain, receives a number of trickling burns. Near the head of this valley is *Lag Uaine*, Green Hollow, with a faery pool in it. Upon a time the faeries of the Lennox had a dyeing factory by the side of this pool in the Green Hollow. Far removed from the interferences of men, they were able to keep to themselves the secret processes whereby they dyed such articles as were sent to them from time to time.

Came a day, however, when the folks of Loch Lomond-side, and indeed of Loch Fyneside too, became inquisitive about the manner in which the Inveruglas faeries conducted their business in the Green Hollow. The incessant interruptions of prying neighbours sorely had tried the patience of the faeries; and they eventually began to feel that the Green Hollow was losing the seclusion that in pristine years had been so conducive to good dyeing. Many attempts to take them by surprise, while in the act of dyeing, had proved abortive. But one day a faery from

his outpost on Ben Ime reported the advance on the Green Hollow of a number of men from the direction of Loch Fyne, moving up from Butterbridge, in Glen Kinglas.

Time to conceal their apparatus there was none. So, after hurried deliberations, they agreed to abandon finally their good work, and to teem their dye-stuffs with their secrets into the pool.

And this explains how, to this day, the waters of this pool in the Green Hollow among the mountains have such a wonderful green colour.

Faery Arrows.

If ever you should find your way to North Uist, you will be told of the tiny arrows, beautifully fashioned, that the faeries are believed to have hurled at the children of men. A specimen of these faery arrows was picked up at Lochmaddy some years ago by a young girl who, on going out into the darkness to gather an armful of peats, heard something whizz through the air, and drop at her feet.

The story is told in Skye of how a man and his wife, while reaping their corn by the light of the moon, were perturbed by a happening they could not explain at the time. Without the slightest warning, the sickle fell to the ground; and the man's hand was found to be bleeding, as though some sharp instrument had pierced it. In the belief that their labouring by moonlight might have given offence to the faeries living in great numbers in this locality, man and wife returned to their croft, resolved that never again would they reap after sundown.

It was not until the following morning, when they returned to the scene of their reaping, that they found a faery dart (*saighead sithe*) lying among the corn. And so they concluded that they had offended the faeries by labouring in moonlight.

The folk-tale still survives in Lorne of a local man who, while trimming a ditch by the roadside with a sharp-pointed spade, suddenly heard something hit the spade. He then proceeded to search the ditch for the object that he thought might have accounted for the strange occurrence. Soon he

came upon a small, flint-like stone, smooth and polished, which he took home with him.

Some weeks passed ere he received confirmation that the stone in question was a faery arrow, which the Little Folk had fired at him, hoping thereby to be able to spirit him away to similar work on *their* behalf. But the sharp-pointed spade had acted as a *sian* or charm, rendering him invulnerable at the time to the weapons of the faeries.

A Faery Spade.

Here is a tale concerning the farm of the Tom of Cluny, situated in Strathtay, near the foot of Cluny Rock.

Many years ago, a woman living at this farm disappeared. Though she was sought for in all directions, no trace could be found of her. At the end of a fortnight's search and anxiety, she calmly walked into the farmhouse, and told her friends that she had been carried away by the faeries to cut peats for them on the adjacent moors.

In proof of this, she produced a spade similar in shape to those used by the peat-cutters, but barely fifteen inches in length. For many years this spade was kept at the farm of the Tom of Cluny; and it is said to have been lost or stolen during a flitting.

A Perpetual Baking.

The story is told in the Isle of Harris of an isleswoman who, when passing by a rock, noticed that the face of it was pierced by a doorway, in which stood a faery woman clad in green, and beyond which stretched a spacious cavern. The faery woman beckoned to the passer-by and urged her to enter the cavern, in order to visit a sick person lying, bedridden, within. Though somewhat uneasy about the invitation, the isleswoman entered duly, but in so doing omitted to take such precaution as would have enabled her to leave when she felt inclined. Soon she found herself surrounded by a huge company, for which she was directed to bake without ado. Only a few handfuls of meal were supplied to her. For this she was thankful at the outset, since she had been assured that, whenever all of it had been used up,

she would be permitted to go her ways without let or hindrance.

Forthwith she began to bake in earnest; but, to her astonishment, the more she baked, the less did the pickle of meal seem to diminish. Day after day, without intermission, she strove to finish this interminable baking. Yet, each evening found her no nearer the end of her task than when she had commenced in the morning.

One day the entire faery throng quitted the cavern on an excursion to the world of ordinary men. The unfortunate woman, left behind to see to it that they were provided with an ample baking on their return, now was given an opportunity of examining the faeries' dwelling closely. As she proceeded toward its inmost recesses, she heard a moaning. This she traced to an alcove where there was a bed, upon which lay an old and sickly man, bed-ridden.

"What brings you here?" inquired the old man.

"I was lured here to attend to a sick person," she responded.

"And what sort of work are they giving you to do?" he asked further.

"Baking, baking, eternally baking!" was her reply. "And the more I bake, the less I am finished."

"Begin once again," said the old man; "and stop putting the pickle of dusting-meal back among the baking!"

The poor woman reverted to the baking-board, and carried out his instruction. In no time the meal was finished; and thus she was able to quit the cavern ere its inhabitants returned.

The Faeries of St. Kilda.

Scattered here and there about the village of Hirta (St. Kilda), now unpeopled, are numerous green mounds that the natives, up to the time of their leaving the island for homes on the mainland of Scotland, used to regard as the abodes of faeries. Many of these mounds in latter years were removed, however, in the course of agricultural improvements.

Among the iris plants behind the village, and situated

close to the Faeries' Brugh, is the House of Calum Mòr, or Big Malcolm. Calum, a lame man, built this house in return for the services of a friend, who went on a fowling expedition to the neighbouring Island of Boreray. When the men of Hirta returned from Boreray, they discovered this semi-underground domicile, complete with turf roofing, and ready for immediate occupation—built all in a single day, they say! The natives were of opinion that the faeries assisted Calum in building it. They used to say, moreover, that, when a libation was poured upon the milking-stone behind the village, they could hear the faeries underneath, rattling their spoons.

Once upon a time two Islanders, in passing a green knoll on which a house now stands, heard a sound as if someone were churning in the interior of the knoll. They paused awhile; and, when deliberating whether they were trespassing on a faery demesne, there opened a concealed door, and a faery woman stepped out to offer each of the passengers a craggan of milk. Only one of them accepted of her generosity, crossing himself while so doing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. She was not long in returning to the seclusion of her dwelling, her feelings hurt at the refusal of one of the strangers, who now passed on their way. But the St. Kildans used to say that the one who had declined the craggan of milk offered to him by the faery woman fell over the cliffs of Oiseval, and was killed, whereas his companion lived long and prospered.

In a letter written on St. Kilda in 1862 to Captain Thomas, R.N., by Miss Anne Kennedy, and printed in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland,* this faery tale is related with minor variations. Miss Kennedy actually supplies us with the names of the two men concerned.

The natives also were in the habit of telling of how a woman, while in the act of pulling corn by the light of the harvest moon, left her infant on a faery mound unwittingly, and returned to find a changeling.

While sitting alone in her cottage, rocking an infant in a cradle, a St. Kildan mother was visited by two faery women clad in green attire. By enchantment they robbed the

mother of the power of speech. And she heard one faery say to the other: "We must give to this child the gift of the tongue, for he has drunk of the milk of the cow that ate the *mothan.*" The old folks of Hirta used to affirm that, when this child came to man's estate, he possessed unusual fluency, and could out-talk a dozen persons on the Island without betraying the least indication of fatigue—a doubtful blessing from the point of view of those who had to live with him! Of the occult powers of the plant known as the *mothan,* I have given some account elsewhere in this volume.

The Faery Flag.

At Dunvegan Castle, in the Isle of Skye, may be seen the famous Faery Flag, one of the most fascinating relics of Faerie in the country. According to one version of its origin, we are told that late on an autumn evening a faery, clad in green, entered the Castle and found her way to what since has been termed the Faery Room. There she discovered the baby heir to MacLeod, asleep in his cradle. You may imagine how surprised MacLeod's nurse was when she looked up to find a strange, little woman seated beside the cradle, and rocking it gently. The faery visitor raised the child in her arms, and wrapped him up in the Faery Flag, crooning the while the *Taladh na Mna Sithe,* the Lullaby of the Faery Woman—"Behold my child, limbed like the kid or fawn, smiting horses, grasping the accoutrements of the shod horses, the spirited steeds, *mo leanabh bheag,* my little child. . . Oh! that I could behold thy team of horses; men following them, serving women returning home, and the Catanaich sowing the corn. . . . Oh! not of Clan Kenneth (MacKenzie) art thou! Oh! not of Clan Conn. Descendant of a race more esteemed—that of Clan Leod of the swords and armour, whose fathers' native land was Lochlann." Thus runs an extract from a free translation of the faery woman's croon made by my late and venerated friend, Francis Tolmie.

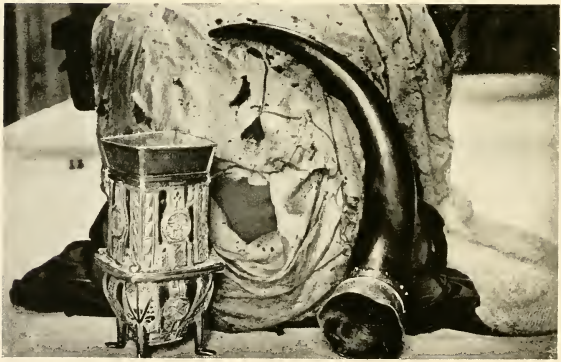
Spellbound and motionless during the singing of it sat the nurse of the infant heir; and so impressed upon her

The Old Bridge spanning the River Forth at the Kirkton of Aberfoyle, Perthshire. (The old folks used to say that, in crossing this bridge, they felt as though they were carrying on their backs the minister who, in 1692, was spirited away to Faeryland.)

[*See P.* 26

[*Facing P.* 20

Dunvegan Castle, Isle of Skye.



[Photo by Canon R. C. MacLeod of MacLeod.

The Faery Flag at Dunvegan, together with Rory Mor's Horn and the Dunvegan Cup

[*Facing P.* 21

memory was the croon that she forgot neither its words nor its melody. When the faery woman disappeared, the nurse lifted the child from his cot wherein he had been replaced; and, having hurried with him down the stair that still winds in the Faery Tower of Dunvegan, carried him into the banqueting-hall, where, in splendour and elegance, were assembled many members of the Clan. And great, to be sure, was their consternation when they cast eyes upon the magic banner, and listened to the strange story that the nurse had to tell.

For a long, long time the MacLeods of Dunvegan insisted that every nurse should be able to sing the Croon of the Faery Woman, because they firmly believed it acted as a *seun* or charm that would protect the infant chieftains from all manner of evil.

In these times the Faery Flag was committed to the charge of a family whose head acted as hereditary custodian of it, and bore it into battle whenever the occasion demanded. MacLeod maintained his *duin'-bratach* or standard-bearer on a freehold near Bracadale, in return for his services in this connection.

But the more generally accepted theory of the Faery Flag is that it came into the possession of a young MacLeod warrior during his absence in the Land of the Infidel. This crusader was none other than Mac a' Phearsan—to wit, the Son of the Parson. During his wanderings in the Holy Land, this knight-errant came to a broad river, where he met the *maighdean-sith*—the faery maiden—who would not permit him to cross until he had wrestled with her as Jacob wrestled with the angel at Penuel. In the legendary struggle that ensued, the MacLeod warrior overcame his elfin adversary; and, while departing from her, he was presented with the Faery Flag that she assured him, when unfurled, would give the appearance of a great multitude of armed men. Be it said, moreover, that the faery maiden warned the crusader only to use the banner on three specific occasions, and told him that, among other calamities, the misuse of it would result in their being no young cattle nor sheep in the territory of the MacLeods. No cow would have a calf; and, likewise, every mare and ewe would

become sterile. Furthermore, there would be plenteousness neither of crops nor of fish for a whole year : nor would any children be born unto MacLeod.

A third version states that one of the chiefs of MacLeod was betrothed to a faery, who dwelt on earth with him only for a short space of time, and that, when she was bidding him farewell before her return to faeryland, she presented him with the Faery Flag as a keepsake. The actual spot where the chief and the faery finally took leave of one another is about three miles from Dunvegan. It is still known as the Faery Bridge (*Drochaid nan tri Allt,* the Bridge of the Brooks), and is situated just at the point where the Portree, Dunvegan, and Vaternish roads converge.

For an account of the occasions on which the Faery Flag was unfurled, and of the prophecies associated with it, I would refer you to Chapter VII of my book, *Over the Sea to Skye.*

Faery Millers.

Long ago the parish minister of Tiree employed a manservant who, to his dying day, avowed that, when bringing a cartload of meal home one night from the island mill, he heard quern-stones operating in the centre of the Red Knowes, by the road-side. He stopped the horse and cart to listen for a while. The sound of the querns continued unceasingly; and from this the minister's manservant concluded that the faeries must have had a considerable quantity of grain in their subterranean granary. All attempts to dispel what many of his neighbours regarded as a delusion failed completely. Neither minister nor kirk-session could disabuse his mind of belief in faeries, and of the faeries' ability to grind corn with the quern, for he inisisted that he had listened to this faery milling " with my own ears ! "

The Little Folk of Sandwick Hill.

The belief that certain metals had the power of warding off evil spirits and of ensuring safety in battle, or when setting out on a journey, was widespread in the Highlands

and Islands; and even to this day there are folks living in the remoter parts of Scotland who have the greatest confidence in the protective properties of such metals. Rusty nails and pins are still believed to possess the power of protecting one from malevolent faeries and other undesirable representatives of the elf-world. In the chapter on the Little Folk contained in my recent publication, *The Haunted Isles,* I told of the old woman living in Lewis, whom my late father knew intimately. She was called *Mòr Nic Dhomhnuill*—Morag, daughter of Donald. Morag, during the greater part of her life, was in direct touch with the faeries inhabiting the knoll known as Cnoc Dubhaig, at Sandwick Hill, not far from the town of Stornoway. But so persistently did they molest her in her latter years that she resorted to collecting every rusty nail and pin and needle she chanced to find. Frequently one might observe her stopping on a cart-track to pick up an odd nail that had worked its way out of a horse-shoe. This collection of metals she conscientiously stuck into a large pin-cushion suspended behind the door of her cottage, believing that only in this wise could she prevent the faeries from invading her home.

While cutting peats on Cnoc Dubhaig as a young girl, Morag allowed herself to fall under the influence of the Sandwick faeries—an influence of which she was quite unable to rid herself in later years. The faeries sat and conversed with her in her old age, despite her repeated protestations to them. She knew all of them by name. One was called *Deocan nam Beann* (Sucking-plant of the Mountains—milk-wort, maybe). Another was called *Popar.* A third was known as *Conachag* (a little conch). *Peulagan* was a fourth; and there were others whose names my kinsfolk at Sandwick cannot now recall.

So demented was Morag on many occasions by the intrusions of the Little Folk of Cnoc Dubhaig that at times she besought local men to discharge a gun over her shoulder, in order to frighten them away. When, just before her death, she entered the house of a neighbour at Sandwick Hill to find a young man in the act of shaving, she insisted that he brandished his razor behind her back, so as to scare

away the faeries that would be following her night and day.

To a friend of mine Morag was in the habit of repeating the conversations that passed between her and the Little Folk. She used to tell of how, when she intended going up to glean the farther end of her croft, she was in the way of hearing the faeries suggesting to one another that they should forestall her by taking a short-cut.

Morag could not evade the faeries of Sandwick Hill. She declared that, if she left the butter uncovered, they always entered her home and expectorated on it. And she maintained that she could not go to the moor for a creel-load of peats without her being escorted by the Little Folk, who would be lifting the full creel on to the back of her.

A Stag's Weight.

The experience of having physical work either lightened or increased by faery agency was confined by no means to Morag and her creel of peats, as the following Mull story shows.

There lived on the east coast of Mull a powerful stalker named Big Hugh, who, late one evening, and in company with a man named Sinclair, killed a hefty stag at Torness, away up in Glen More, several miles distant from his home. As Big Hugh lifted the dead creature on to his back, Sinclair inquired of him whether he felt it heavy. He replied that he might as well attempt to carry the world home on his back. He was just on the point of abandoning his load when Sinclair took out his pocket-knife, opened a blade of it, and thrust it into the carcase. Big Hugh instantly announced that all the weight had gone. Before midnight the stag was lying outside the door of his home, seven miles from Torness. The weight he had found unbearable was the doing of the faeries!

The Secret Commonwealth.

In the ancient burying-ground at the Kirkton of Aberfoyle, which lies in close proximity to the old bridge arching the Forth, and bearing what in olden times was the only road linking these parts with Glasgow and the south, is a stone

commemorating the life of the Rev. Robert Kirk, one time minister of Aberfoyle, who, about the year 1691, wrote the *Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Faunes, and Faeries*—a mysterious work that Eneas MacKay of Stirling has republished recently in most attractive form from the 1893 edition, together with a fascinating introduction by that grand old man of Scotland, the late Robert Bontine Cunninghame Graham. This stone is now inventoried as an ancient monument, under the care of the Office of Works. It bears the following dignified and simple inscription :

ROBERTUS KIRK, A.M.
Linguæ Hiberniæ Lumen.

But it is disputed whether Kirk was ever interred in the tomb at Aberfoyle, since he is said to have been carried off to Faeryland.

" The ashes of Mr Kirk are not there," wrote Andrew Lang in the singularly learned introduction he contributed in the form of " A Comment " to the 1893 edition of Kirk's treatise. The account of Kirk's translation to the Secret Commonwealth of Faeries, as given by the Rev. Dr Patrick Grahame, D.D., his successor at Aberfoyle, runs as follows :—" He was walking, it is said, one evening in his nightgown upon a little eminence to the west of the Manse, which is still reckoned a *Dun shi'*. He fell down dead, as was believed; but this was not his fate :

" It was between the day and night,
When the faery king has power,
That he sunk down (but not) in sinful fray,
And, 'twixt life and death, was snatched away
To the joyless Elfin bower."

" Mr Kirk was a near relation of Graham of Duchray. Shortly after his funeral, he appeared in the dress in which he had sunk down, to a mutual relation of his own and of Duchray.' Go,' said he to him, ' to my cousin Duchray, and tell him that I am not dead; I fell down in a swoon, and was carried off into Faeryland, where I now am. Tell him,

that when he and my friends are assembled at the baptism of my child (for he had left his wife pregnant) I will appear in the room, and that if he throws the knife which he holds in his hand over my head, I will be released, and restored to human society.' The man, it seems, neglected for some time to deliver the message. Mr Kirk appeared to him a second time, threatening to haunt him night and day till he executed his commission, which, at length, he did. The time of the baptism arrived. They were seated at the table; Mr Kirk entered, but Duchray, by some unaccountable fatality, neglected to perform the prescribed ceremony. Mr Kirk retired by another door, and was seen no more. It is firmly believed that he is, to this day, in Faeryland."

The old folks crossing the River Forth at Aberfoyle, just by the *"Dun Shi'"* or faery knoll, used to say that, ever since the translation of the Rev. Robert Kirk to the Secret Commonwealth of Faeries, they felt as though someone were riding on their backs. And they sincerely believed this to be none other than the minister who, about the year 1692, had been "spirited away" to faeryland.[1]

Two Tiny Boys with Green Vests.

Let me conclude this chapter with an account of an extraordinary story of faeries who visited the Island of Muck about twenty-five years ago. I had this story from the Rev. Alexander Fraser, a recent minister of the Parish of the Small Isles, which includes Muck.

Returning by the *S.S. Plover* from the neighbouring Isle of Canna early one autumn morning about twenty-five years ago, Mr Fraser went ashore in a small boat belonging to a couple of lobster-fishermen named Campbell and MacDonald, who had rowed out to the steamer with a number of lobster-boxes destined for the south. When rowing back to the shore with their passenger, Campbell, who was an elder in Mr Fraser's church, said—

[1] Those who may feel inclined to pursue this matter further should refer to the excellent paper on "The Life and Literary Labours of the Rev. Robert Kirk, of Aberfoyle," read before the Gaelic Society of Inverness in 1924 by Professor Donald MacLean, D.D., and reprinted in Volume XXXI of the Society's transactions.

" Well, Mr Fraser, I would give a thousand pounds to have seen the faeries Sandy MacDonald's boys saw the other morning."

" Do you really mean to say that Sandy's boys, aged ten and seven, actually saw faeries? " inquired Mr Fraser.

" Yes, they did for certain, without any doubt! " urged Campbell.

" Well, then, tell us all about it," said Mr Fraser.

And so Campbell proceeded to narrate the following tale.

On Friday morning Sandy MacDonald's two boys went to search the beach for driftwood and things lost by ships in storms. Situated above a green knoll by the beach, just where a small peninsula juts out toward Ardnamurchan, is a narrow cove, in which they found a tin that never had been opened. Anxious to discover what the tin contained, the lads took it up to a crevice near at hand. On commencing to strike it open with a big stone, lo! two tiny boys with green vests appeared beside them, and inquired of them in excellent English what they were trying to do. They replied that they were endeavouring to break open the tin, which they believed to contain paint. Evidently Sandy MacDonald's lads were " under spell." They were simply " charmed " by the little fellows in the green vests, who questioned them regarding their home and their family, and who also could speak the Gaelic.

Then the lads perceived that, lying alongside the little cove was a tiny boat with a beautiful cabin aft. In the doorway of the cabin stood a wee woman. By her side barked a fully-grown dog, about the size of a rat. MacDonald's boys also noticed that the cabin contained a number of pots and pans and other kitchen utensils.

Said the little woman, charmingly attired in green raiment, to the lads—

" Come into the cabin and have your tea with us before you go home."

However, the lads were loth to step aboard the faery boat; and so the little woman handed out to them a few loaves of faery bread, each about the size of a walnut. These they ate, and enjoyed.

Then said the little green boys to MacDonald's lads : " We

are departing now. When you see our boat out at the Dubh Sgeir (a certain black rock out a little from the shore), you must return home. We will not be coming back here any more; but others of our race will be coming."

Not long after the faery boat had left the shore, Sandy MacDonald's daughter came on the scene, while looking for her young brothers. Suddenly she noticed them sitting on a rock by the shore, gazing out to sea—gazing presumably at the faery boat, which appeared to be steering for Ireland.

"What are you doing here?" she shouted. The sound of her voice broke the spell that the faeries had put on the lads; and immediately they went home with their sister. While 'under spell' they had been "awfully happy," to use their own words: now they trembled with a strange fear.

At intervals during the next few years the lads narrated this experience to their parents, and also to several neighbours on the Island of Muck, without any variation.

Truly, Sandy MacDonald's boys communed with faeries on this occasion, and ate of faery bread.

Engaged to the Clerk to the Faeries.

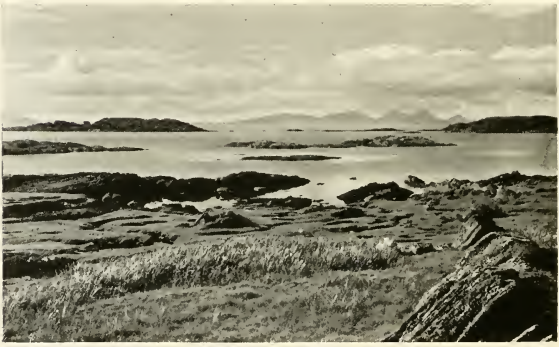
Belief in faeries is by no means on the wane in the Highlands and Islands. When staying with Kenneth MacLeod at the Manse of Gigha recently, he told me of a Hebridean woman, now dead, whom he met some years ago, when she and he were visiting mutual friends in Perthshire, and who, while perfectly sane and normal in ordinary respects, numbered one or two faeries among her acquaintances. When Kenneth and the late Mrs Kennedy-Fraser were collaborating in *The Songs of the Hebrides,* he obtained from this woman some good, old songs and stories. She firmly believed that she had been engaged once to a faery—"and to the Clerk to the Faeries at that!" Kenneth assures me.

Isle of Eigg from Isle of Muck.

Isle of Muck from Isle of Eigg.

[*Facing P.* 28

Isle of Rum enshrouded in storm, as seen from the Singing Sands of Laig Bay, Isle of Eigg.



Bens of Jura from Isle of Gigha.

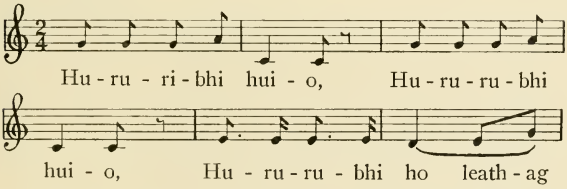
[*Facing P.* 29

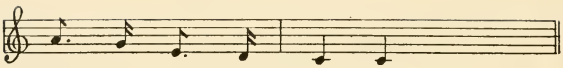
CHAPTER TWO

Faery Music.

ACCORDING to some, who claim to be authorities on matters faerie, the bagpipes are the only musical instrument known to the faeries of the Highlands and Islands; and it is believed that in olden times many of the most celebrated pipers in Scotland learnt their art originally from the Little People. Occasionally, however, we hear of the proficiency with which certain faery folks are able to play the *clarsach*, or Celtic harp. I know two or three people among my own acquaintances who have listened to faery harping, and who can remember fragments of the melodies they heard.

Upon a time there lived on Mingulay, in the Outer Hebrides, a certain *Fionnladh Mac Iain 'ic Dhuibh-Shith*, Finlay, Son of Iain, Son of the Black Faery. Finlay was renowned throughout the Isles for his fair countenance; and, forby, he had a faery sweetheart. One day, while he was searching for sheep among the mists enshrouding Beinn a Phì, out of the mists there stepped a faery who delighted his ears with strains of faery music.[1] From Miss Annie Johnstone, Castlebay, in the faery-haunted Isle of Barra, I received the following piece of music heard by Finlay on this occasion:



[1] For further details of Finlay's exploits, see my book, *The Haunted Isles*, pp. 79-81.

FAERY BAGPIPES ON THE ISLE OF MUCK.

Now, there resides on the Isle of Muck, one of the Inner Hebrides group known as the Small Isles, a certain Colin Campbell, who frequently has enjoyed the strains of faery bagpipes. One day in summer, a few years ago, Colin threw himself down on a grassy knowe on his native island to have a snooze. As his ear touched the ground, he heard what ever since he has described as the finest pibroch music to which he has listened. When Colin first told his neighbours of this experience, he declared that he was quite familiar with the airs the faeries were playing. The music died away, he continued, whenever he raised his head from the ground. But, each time he placed his ear to the knowe, he could hear faery bagpipes quite plainly. "My word!" Colin Campbell averred, "*that* was the pibroch!"

When on a visit to Muck a year or two ago, my hostess called me to the door of her cottage one morning, and said: "Look you! Yon man leaning against the gable is Colin Campbell, who knows all about the faeries, and often hears faery bagpipes." Thereupon I made my way toward Colin, exchanged with him a few casual salutations in the Gaelic, and then proceeded to ask him about the faeries and their music. To begin with, Colin affected not to understand in the least what I was referring to. So I changed the subject temporarily. But he now appeared little interested. Something was worrying him. It soon became obvious that he was trying to summon sufficient confidence to tell me of his experiences. All this time he leaned against the gable of his home, with his back to me and his hands in his pockets, gazing out across the sea to Ardnamurchan, and uttering not a cheep. But, as I was on the point of moving away, Colin, without turning round or moving in the slightest degree, whispered: "Och, it was the faery pipes I was hearing right enough!"

The idea troubled him that I should leave the Isle of Muck without his confessing to me that *he* was none other than the hearer of faery music. Thereafter Colin became more communicative; and I left him with the promise that one day I would return to Muck, in order to reduce to musical form such faery melodies as he could recollect having heard.

A Faery Orchestra.

There is a tale told in the Lewis of how two young men chanced to be passing a faery knoll at the witching hour, when the knoll suddenly opened and emitted a green light. For a moment the men stood in astonishment, not knowing what had befallen them, until they realised that they were listening to a faery orchestra secreted in the very interior of the knoll. So overcome was one of them by the strains of faery music—he himself being a fiddler of sorts—that he straightway forsook his companion, and made for the green light. No sooner had the passing fiddler been admitted to the company of the faeries than the knoll closed. And so enchanted was he by the music of the faery orchestra, and he himself contributing his part with a fiddle the faeries had lent him, that he eventually returned to his people in the belief that he had been absent but a few hours, whereas he actually had been away a year and a day. So well did he play his fiddle thereafter that no one dared disbelieve his story that he had performed with a faery orchestra.

Music equally enthralling was once heard by a Skye-man in the Braes of Portree, when passing the hillock known to the Gaelic-speaking natives by a name signifying Faery Knowe of the Beautiful Mountain.

And, then, delightful pipe-music has been heard issuing from underneath the Dùn of Caolis, at the eastern end of Tiree; and the old folks of Tiree used to say that to this music they often heard the marching of many feet underground.

Black MacKenzie of the Pipes.

One, MacKenzie by name, who later became weaver to the laird of Barcaldine, happened to be homeward bound one

evening, accompanied by a friend, carrying in turn on their backs a jar of whisky. In passing a hillock, the interior of which was gaily illumined, they were tempted to enter—but not before MacKenzie's friend had stuck a knife in the door-post to ensure his being able to leave whenever he wanted. Inside the hillock they found a band of pipers supplying music for a reel then in progress. MacKenzie danced reel after reel, and showed himself so little disposed to leaving the faeries' abode that his friend wearied of waiting, and consequently left without him.

Days passed; and no explanation was forthcoming such as would account for the mysterious disappearance of MacKenzie. His relatives suspected foul play on the part of his friend. But it was decided that, should he not turn up at the end of a year, they would organise a party to dig down into the hillock from above, in the hope of solving matters. A year and a day passed; and still there was no sign of MacKenzie. And so, a year and two days after his disappearance, the interior of the hillock was entered from above, and MacKenzie was found on the faeries' dancing-floor, and he still at the reels. In this wise was MacKenzie rescued from his elfin captors.

Now, it is held that the weaver obtaining a shuttle from the faeries is able to weave thrice as much cloth as any ordinary weaver. So it proved to be with MacKenzie, when he returned again to live the everyday life. "At the first move of the shuttle," he maintained, "myself and another will be at the weaving." And, therefore, the laird of Barcaldine promoted him to the rank of weaver-in-chief at Barcaldine Castle.

To his accomplishments MacKenzie now added piping; and he also began to make pipes himself. Thus he became known throughout Argyll as Black MacKenzie of the Pipes. But they say that, though he wove and piped better than in the days before his sojourn in faeryland, he never prospered thereafter.

Big Donald, King of the Faeries.

Beside Loch Morlich there is a *sithean*, or faery knowe, that is believed to be the abode of Big Donald, King of the

The harbour of Port Mòr, Isle of Muck, with Ardnamurchan in the distance. (At Port Mòr resides Colin Campbell, who frequently hears the faery bagpipes.)

[*See P.* 30

The Elf-haunted Hills of North Harris as seen from Ardhasaig, on the road to Lewis. In the middle-distance lies the inmost stretch of West Loch Tarbert. On the opposite shore stands the whaling-station, recently abandoned, and now largely dismantled.

[*Facing P.* 32

Low tide and high summer at Balemartine, Isle of Tiree—an Isle celebrated for its Faery Dogs and Faery Cattle.

Nightfall at Luskentyre, and the tide filling the pools to their autumn brims. It is here that the herd of faery cows is said to have come ashore.

[*Facing P.* 33

Faeries. This knowe is also said to be the meeting-place of they fey folks inhabiting the secret recesses of Rothiemurchus and of the Braes of Abernethy. Not so long ago a man, who was in the habit of boasting that he had no illusions about faeries and the like, was passing by this loch, when he heard the sound of distant bagpipes. As the sound drew nearer to him, he began to look around him for the piper. But, nearer and nearer and louder and louder though the piping came, there was no sign anywhere of the player. So close to him came the music eventually that he actually stepped aside, so as to allow the invisible piper to pass. The man, who had this strange experience by the shore of Loch Morlich, declared emphatically that, as he stepped aside, he felt on his cheeks the gusts of wind that were issuing from the drones of the bagpipes. When he told this to his friends in Spey-side, they all were of opinion that he had heard the faery bagpipes, played by none other than Big Donald, King of the Faeries.

Robin Og and the Faery Pipes.

There was a certain Robin Og who frequently listened to the music of faery pipes as he passed by the *sithean* of Big Donald, King of the Faeries. Robin Og came to learn that there were ways in which even ordinary mortals like himself could obtain favours from the faery folk. Therefore, in passing the *sithean* one day, he flung his bonnet into the air in accordance with custom, and whispered in the gaelic : *" Is leat-sa so: is leam-sa sin!*—This is yours : that is mine ! " In so saying, he flung his knitted bonnet toward the *sithean.* In exchange for the bonnet, there immediately fell at his feet a tiny set of bagpipes. Robin Og scarcely could believe his eyes as he stopped to pick up this precious gift, and placed it deftly in an inside pocket of his jacket. When he returned home, however, he could find in his pocket nothing but a puff-ball and a crumpled fragment of willow-reed.

Faery Music among the Moonlit Snows.

One moonlit night in winter two children, who were brother and sister, set out for Kennavarra Hill, in Tiree,

to examine a snare they had laid there. They had not reached their destination when, in picking the best route through the snows lying in a hollow, they heard the most wonderful music issuing from underground. But fear soon overtook them; and they fled home with all speed.

Many years afterwards, when the sister was an old woman, she used to tell the natives of Tiree that she had never forgotten the fear that took possession of her when she heard in her childhood the wild strains of faery music among the moonlit snows on Kennavarra.

The Silver Chanter of the MacCrimmons.

It was a faery who bequeathed to one of the first of the MacCrimmons of Skye the Silver Chanter that afterwards led to their proficiency as pipers, and to their appointment as hereditary pipers to MacLeod of MacLeod, at Dunvegan Castle. A faery chanced to find Iain Og MacCrimmon seated on a mound near his home at Borreraig, in the west of Skye, and he disconsolate that his playing had not been adjudged meritorious enough to warrant his attending at Dunvegan a competition promoted by MacLeod. So the faery addressed Iain Og thus:

> "Thy manly beauty and the sweetness of thy music
> Have brought thee a faery sweetheart:
> Now I bequeath to thee this Silver Chanter,
> Which, at the touch of thy fingers, will ever bring
> forth the sweetest music."

Thereupon the faery gave Iain Og MacCrimmon not only the Silver Chanter for his pipes, but also the art of the pibroch. Off to Dunvegan hastened Iain Og with his Silver Chanter, to vie with other pipers from all over the Highlands as to which of them would become hereditary piper to MacLeod of MacLeod. The judges agreed that Iain Og's piping was the best. They readily recognised that it exhibited qualities possessed only by one who had the gift of faery fingers on the chanter. Thus he became hereditary piper at Dunvegan; and from that day the MacCrimmons of Skye produced many generations of

illustrious pipers, and many composers of pipe-music—among them Padruig Mòr MacCrimmon himself.

The famous piping-college of the MacCrimmons was founded at Borreraig shortly after the Silver Chanter came into their possession, it is said; and to this college travelled pupils from all parts of Scotland and Ireland. The piping course was a long and strenuous one. "To the making of a piper," wrote Neil Munro, "go seven years of his own learning, and seven generations before." But it is said that the training at Borreraig often extended over a period of *ten* years.

When the faery endowed young MacCrimmon with the Silver Chanter for his pipes, together with the art of the pibroch, she cautioned him that, if ever he, or any piper of his family in generations to come, should treat the Chanter with anything but reverence, the hereditary gift of piping would vanish from his kindred. Some centuries later, when MacCrimmon's descendant, who accompanied the Chief of the MacLeods, was returning home to Skye from the adjoining Island of Raasay, a swell on the tide was making piping irksome. In his capacity as hereditary piper, MacCrimmon occupied the piper's seat at the prow of the Chief's galley. As he continued to play, the swell continued to increase, so that every now and then his fingers, deft though they were, would slip from their wonted intervals on the Silver Chanter. This annoyed MacCrimmon so exceedingly that eventually he suspended his playing in disgust. In laying down his pipes, he gave expression to some unhappy remark about the Chanter, having forgotten for the moment the hereditary obligation placed centuries earlier upon his race by the faery donor. Thereupon the Chanter, of its own accord, rose from the galley, and slipped over the gunwale into the sea, where it lies to this day.

It is said that, with the loss of the Silver Chanter, the spell was broken. Thereafter the MacCrimmons' hereditary supremacy quickly declined; and their school of piping, overlooking the tide at Borreraig, fell into decay. To-day at Borreraig there remains not a vestige of the piping-college: nor does any MacCrimmon own a scrap of land

in this neighbourhood. But, as recently as 1933, the compositions of Padruig Mòr resounded through western Skye when a memorial cairn was raised to the MacCrimmons at Borreraig, and a mural tablet to them unveiled in the old Churchyard of Kilmuir, in Dunvegan, where moulders the dust of some of the Chiefs of the MacLeods of Skye. Inscribed on the cairn is a Gaelic legend, of which the following is a translation: "The Memorial Cairn of the MacCrimmons, of whom ten generations were the hereditary pipers of MacLeod, and who were renowned as Composers, Performers, and Instructors of the Classical Music of the Bagpipe. Near to this spot stood the MacCrimmon School of Music, 1500-1800."

Cha till, cha till, cha till MacCruimein,
An cogadh no 'n sith, cha till e tuilleadh;
Le airgid no ni cha till MacCruimein,
Cha till e gu brath gu là na cruinne.

MacCrimmon will never, will never return,
In war or in peace, he will come no more;
With riches or otherwise MacCrimmon will return not:
He will not come ever till the Gathering-day.

But the sea-cliffs and caverns at Borreraig are haunted yet by the ghosts of the ancient pipers; and, in the cry of the seabirds, the man with the ear for pibroch may detect a stray note of the art that vanished with them.

CHAPTER III

FAERY DOGS AND FAERY CATTLE.

FEW objects produced more terror among the Islesfolks than the *cu sith*, or faery dog, a creature of ill omen they sometimes encountered on dark nights, moving swiftly and noiselessly from place to place. Faery dogs are said to be about the size of a two-year-old stirk. For the most part, they are dark green in colour, though toward the feet the green takes on a lighter hue. Some possess long tails, which they coil over their backs: others have a flat tail, "plaited like the straw rug of a packsaddle." Their motion is silent and rhythmical, and is always in a straight line. Their bark has been described as a rude clamour. It sounds not unlike that of an ordinary dog, but it is louder. Faery dogs, they say in the Isles, bark only three times; and there is usually a fair interval between each bark, which gives to the terror-stricken hearer a chance of making for safety before he heards the third bark. Otherwise, he is liable to be overtaken and destroyed by the faery dog.

The footprints of the faery dog are said to be very large. Some aver that they are as broad as the spread of the human hand. They have been traced in snow, in muddy places, and upon the sands.

The following folk-tales, many of which are still recounted round the peat-fires in the Highlands and Islands, testify to the activities of this creature, as also to the attitude adopted toward it by an imaginative and superstitious people.

Imprints upon the Sand.

There is a folk-tale still told in Tiree of how an islander, when crossing the machar near Kennavarra, came within sight of one such dog crouching by a sand-dune, and

immediately altered the direction in which he was making for home. Reflecting on this sinister spectacle the following morning, he resolved to put his courage to the test, and re-visit the sand-dune. Upon the sand at this spot he discovered the imprints of a dog's paws, "as large as the spread of his palm." The imprints he traced for some distance, until they came to an end. He saw no dog anywhere, nor any beast likely to have left marks of this kind; and so he concluded that the object he had seen the previous evening was not of earthly origin, and must have been a faery dog.

Lair of the Faery Dog.

By the shore elsewhere in Tiree there is a cavern known traditionally as the Lair of the Faery Dog, whence the barking of a huge dog has been heard. And a shepherd, sheltering one day behind a rock in Lorne, noticed in a hollow beside him what he took to be two fairly large pups. However, when he ventured to examine the pups more closely, he was startled at finding that they were considerably larger than his own full-grown collies. On his realising them to be the whelps of a faery dog, he departed with all celerity, lest the mother should make her appearance. Tradition in Argyll has it that the shepherd's dogs on this occasion exhibited the same apprehension as did their master.

And, then, there is the case of the old woman who, on searching the beach of Tiree for driftwood, just at that part of the island known as Reef, heard a faery hound barking mysteriously and ominously. When telling of this weird experience, she used to describe how a neighbour, who accompanied her at the time, instantly seized her by the arm, and hurried home with her—for, as I have said, it was faithfully held in the Isles that, if the faery dog were heard to bark thrice, it would assuredly overtake the hearer.

Yet another tale of the faery dog is told in Tiree. In the days when the summer shieling still constituted a feature of West Highland and Hebridean life, a family set out with its cows for the pastures at the base of Heynish Hill, in the south-west of Tiree. One night two young boys of the

family, whose turn it was to spend the night in the open with the cows, so as to prevent their roaming, crept into the shieling in the small hours to enjoy the proverbial forty winks. As they were on the point of falling asleep, they were startled by a noise as of a number of large-pawed creatures trampling heavily on the turfen roof, and by loud howlings. When the roof was examined in daylight, it betrayed deep indentations left by the paws of faery dogs.

Faery Dogs in Benbecula.

Now, it was when the Great Clan Ranald, himself, resided at Nunton, in the Isle of Benbecula, that two men, while tending calves in the "long house" at night-time, sat and talked before the glowing peats. Suddenly there rushed in upon them a couple of faery dogs, held together by a leash of precious metal, inlaid with precious stones that glittered in the fire-glow. Then a mystic voice was heard without:

> "Slender-fay, slender-fay!
> Mountain-traveller, mountain-traveller!
> Black-faery, black-faery!
> Lucky-treasure, lucky-treasure!
> Grey-hound, grey-hound!
> Seek-beyond, seek-beyond!"[1]

Out rushed the faery dogs, the two men following them as soon as they had recovered their senses. And there, in the night sky, they beheld the *Sluagh*, or Spirit-host, with hounds on leash and hawks on wrist, and they on the point of travelling westward on a hunting expedition. So astounded were the men, says the Gaelic chronicler, that they could recollect only a few of the sounds they had heard, though the welkin rang with the music of bells, and with the voices of the *Sluagh* calling their hounds by name.

Seaward, in the face of the Grey West Wind, sped this multitude of departed spirits, out beyond Benbecula and the Monach Isles, beyond Hirta and Rockall, until they arrived at *Tir-nan-Og* itself—Land-of-Youth and the Land-under Waves, far beneath the western seas. "Fortune follow

[1] *Carmina Gadelica*, Vol. II.

them, and luck of game," wrote the ancient Gaelic chronicler. "And, O King of the Sun, and of the Moon, and of the bright, effulgent Stars! it was they who put fear and fright, and more than enough, on the men and the calves of Clan Ranald."

The Oracular Tooth of the Faery Dog.

The grandfather of a friend of mine, living in Lewis, used to observe from time to time that the supply of potatoes in his barn was diminishing gradually by some strange agency. The old man concealed himself in the barn many times in the hope of detecting the thief; but never a soul seemed to be coming near the barn. Yet the potatoes continued to disappear. One morning he discovered what he took to be the fang of an ordinary dog. It was sticking in one of the potatoes. On picking it up and examining it more closely, however, he found that in reality it was one of those much-coveted charms, a faery-dog tooth. The tooth of the faery dog, they say, has occult powers. When placed in drinking-water, for example, it heals ailing cattle that drink of such water. It also possesses the property of restoring the substance extracted from milk by witches and evil spirits.

The faery-dog tooth I mention is being handed down through my friend's family. It is regarded as a precious heirloom. At the moment it is in Canada with the widow of the previous heir to it.

Faery Cows.

Akin to the faery dog are the *crò sith,* or faery cattle. These creatures are said to be dun-coloured usually, and hornless. In the Isle of Skye and in Tiree, however, it is held that they are oftener red or speckled, and that, moreover, they are able to swim across the sea. Not on every earthly pasture will they graze. It is computed that they have been known to graze on no more than ten spots throughout the Highlands and Islands.

When the faery cattle were brought home to the byre from their particular pasturage at Guershader, near Portree,

the faery herdswoman might be heard uttering the following lines in enumerating her herd:

"Crooked one, dun one,
Little wing grizzled,
Black cow, white cow,
Little bull, black-headed,
My milch kine have come home,
O dear! that the herdsman would come!" [1]

This strange species of cattle, resembling so little the cattle of ordinary origin, have been found on the strand at Luskentyre, in Harris, Scorribreac, in Skye, on the Isle of Tiree, and also on the Island of Berneray, in the Sound of Harris. They are believed to feed not on grass, but on seaweed under the sea, where they usually live.

A Small, Red Cow.

One night toward the close of the eighteenth century, when a certain Dugald Campbell was tending the cows belonging to the farm of Baile-phuil, on the coast of Tiree, a small, red cow came among the herd. The Baile-phuil cows immediately proceeded to set about it with their horns. When it fled, they followed it. Dugald joined in the pursuit, during which, as he himself testified, the little, red cow at one moment seemed to be quite near him, and at another moment very far off. The chase was brought to an abrupt end when the little, red cow entered the face of a rock, and thus disappeared from view, never to be seen again by human eye.

In relating this incident, Dugald Campbell insisted that he had the greatest difficulty in preventing the Baile-phuil cows from following the intruder into the face of the rock.

Sea-Cows at Luskentyre.

Several generations ago a herd of cows came ashore at Nisabost, which then formed part of the farm of Luskentyre, in South Harris. In order to prevent their return to

[1] J. G. Campbell's *Superstitions of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.*

the sea, if possible, the natives got between them and the shore, and drove them inland with the assistance of such weapons as lay ready to hand. It was discovered that even handfuls of sand thrown between these sea-cows and the shore checked their return to the sea. In many respects these particular animals resembled ordinary Highland cattle, although they were known to dwell under the sea, and to feed on the sea-weed called *meillich* in the Gaelic. Some of them broke back to the sea: others settled down at Luskentyre.

Faery Cattle in the Isle of Skye.

Very similar were the faery cows that once came ashore at the Great Rock of MacNicol, on the farm of Scorribreac, in Skye. On this occasion the entire herd was intercepted in its attempt to return to the sea, by the scattering of earth on the strip of land separating it from the water. In the Highlands and Western Isles it was held that a sprinkling of earth taken from a burying-ground was most efficacious in such circumstances.

Toward the evening of the day on which the faery cattle came ashore at Scorribreac, a voice from the sea was heard calling them back by name. And the names by which they were called were taken down at the time. These names, of course, were in the Gaelic; and the Gaelic rhyme by which they are remembered is still known among those interested in these matters. The rhyme illustrates, moreover, that these faery cows varied considerably in colour. One was brown; and another was black. There was a red one, and a brindled one, and so on. In response to the voice from the sea, the whole herd ultimately returned to its watery element.

Red-eared Sea-Cattle.

Dr. Alexander Carmichael tells us in his notes to *Carmina Gadelica* that several sea-cows once came ashore at "the Sruth," or Stream, at Obbe, in South Harris. A sea-maiden tending these sea-cows herded them back to the sea, and away down the Sound of Harris; and, as she herded them,

she sang in the Gaelic a song, the first verse of which has been translated as follows:

> "A low is heard in the sea of Canna,
> A cow from Tiree, and cow from Barra,
> A cow from Islay, a cow from Arran,
> And from green Kintyre of birches."

According to Carmichael, the sea-cattle are red-eared; and some of them are also notch-eared. "Probably these red-eared cattle," he writes, "are descended from the old Caledonian white cattle, whose ears were red."

As late as 1854 a creature described as a water-cow was seen in a sealoch in the Gairloch region of Ross.

Traditions relating the faery cows still linger in Bread-albain. Long ago, it is said, a herd of faery cows roamed the pastures of Ben Lawers. These cows were dun-coloured, and hummel or hornless; and they used to get with calf in a way that mystified the natives, until it was observed that at certain times they made for the fringes of Loch Tay, where they stood lowing for the water-bull.

The Sea-Cattle's Croon.

The Rev. Dr. Kenneth MacLeod has just reduced to notation a traditional melody said to have been sung by a herd-woman from the sea to a cattle-man from Uig, in Skye. This melody will be published shortly, along with several other fragments of folk-music Kenneth has rescued from oblivion.

The faery cattle, it will be noted, have their herd-men and herd-women, just as have ordinary herds. The north of Skye was famous for its cattle folds; and in olden times the folds of Duntulm and Monkstadt were so beautiful that it was believed they had sea-cattle blood in them. There are no such folds nowadays, either at Duntulm or at Monkstadt.

CHAPTER IV

THE BROWNIE

FOLK-TALES relating to the supernatural creature called the Brownie are almost as common throughout the Highlands and Islands of Scotland as are faery-tales. Several ancient and well-known Highland homes are said to have housed a Brownie, although in Scotland, as elsewhere, belief in the existence of Brownies is much more recent than faith in the existence of the Faery Folk.[1]

Opinions vary as to the physical proportions of the average Brownie, and as to his general appearance. According to Thomas Pennant, he was stout and blooming, carried a fine head of flowing hair, and moved noislessly from place to place with a switch in his hand. Other authorities describe him as having been short in stature, curly-headed, and wrinkle-faced. But many depict him in a much more attractive form. Be this as it may, the Highland Brownie has always been regarded with esteem and affection.

Generally speaking, Brownies were said to take up residence in the castles and mansions of the more affluent families; and, even when such abodes fell into desuetude and ultimate decay, Brownies have been known to stay on among the ruins for considerable periods. Several of them are believed to have lived to a great age. For example, the Brownie that haunted the corridors of Leithin Hall, in Dumfriesshire, is reputed to have remained there continuously throughout three centuries.

That the Brownie took upon himself social and domestic duties which were varied, and usually of a beneficent character, is amply illustrated by the following folk-tales relating to distinguished members of this elfin brotherhood.

[1] Brownies are the equivalent of the *lares,* or hearth spirits, of the Romans.

The Little Old Man of the Barn.

Up till the time of "the Forty-five," it is said, every clachan and farm in the Highlands of Perthshire had its own Brownie. This beneficent fellow went by a Gaelic name signifying the Little Old Man of the Barn, since he used to assist in threshing the corn with the flail, and in redding up the barn by gathering up the straw into tidy sheaves for the bedding of the livestock. The barn he looked upon as his special province. Brownies with duties such as these got their name because of their wisdom and elderly appearance.

The activities of the Little Old Man of the Barn were confined to the night-time. All his threshing was done after midnight; and it was his plan to see that he had quitted the binding of the sheaves ere any human being was astir

> "Whan thair wes corne to thrashe or dichte,
> Or barne or byre to clene,
> He had ane bizzy houre at nichte,
> Atween the twall and ane."

The Little Old Man of the Barn had an equivalent on the Isle of Man in the person of the Grey-headed One (*Glaisein*), who paid periodic visits to farms, threshed corn, and attended the fold.

A Colonsay Brownie.

Colonsay also had its brownie, upon whom devolved somewhat similar duties; and there are folks still living at Uragaig, on that Island, who remember clearly when elderly natives used to pour into a cavity in the ground a libation of milk for the sustenance of this creature, in order to ensure the continuance of his good graces. As recently as 1880 a Colonsay woman admitted to Symington Grieve, author of that exhaustive work, *The Book of Colonsay & Oronsay,* that she sometimes poured milk into a basin for the supernatural creature called the glaistig. Belief in brownies and glaistigs persisted in Colonsay right down to the present century. As recently as May, 1910, crofters placed milk in the cavity of a stone near Balnahard farmhouse. This was

done each year, and on the first night on which the cattle were left out all night. On such occasions each crofter was obliged to give the whole of the night's milk from one cow. Once he had poured this milk into the cavity, it became incumbent upon him to turn away immediately, and not look back under any circumstances.

The Invisible Herdsman.

Brownies are also known to have taken upon themselves the duties of the herdsman. When, as in olden times, arable land was tilled and reaped in common throughout the Isles, difficulty was often experienced, especially during the night-time, in keeping the cows away from the crops. There is a tradition in the Island of Tiree, however, that the crofters at the township of Baugh were relieved of this irksome responsibility by the constant services of a Brownie who, in an invisible capacity, acted as herdsman between the hours of sunset and sunrise. No ordinary person ever cast eyes on this Brownie, though many a vigil was instituted in the expectation of ascertaining what he was like, and whence he came. One endowed with the second-sight stayed out all night with the cattle; and he declared in the morning that he actually saw an impalpable creature herding the cattle down to the machar by the shore when it looked as though they were beginning to graze too near the crops. This he took to be the Brownie herdsman, of whose existence every-one had heard. The Brownie wore little or no clothing. This moved the observer to pity—so much so, indeed, that he offered the Brownie a pair of shoes and a pair of tiny breeks. It was then that the Brownie divulged his name, as he declined the offer with—

> "Shoes and breeks on Gunna,
> And Gunna at the herding;
> But may Gunna enjoy neither shoes nor breeks,
> If he should herd the cattle any more."

With these words the Invincible Herdsman took his departure; and ever since that incident the folks of Tiree have been obliged to do their own herding of nights.

Letting in the Rain.

This recalls the faery-tale about the man who, when tethering his horse or cow on a *sithean* or faery knoll near his home, took such pains not to damage the green sward, covering the knoll, that the faery inmates relieved him of the task of moving his animals to a sheltered spot in wild weather.

But that all owners of animals were not so considerate is shown by the following folk-tale associated with the Island of Coll. One evening a crofter was tethering his pony on a grassy hillock. As he was driving the tether-peg well into the ground by striking it on the head with a stone, a little face showed itself above the ground, and a voice spoke that warned him to pasture his pony elsewhere hereafter, as the constant driving down of the peg was letting rain into the interior of the hillock, and on one occasion the point of it had actually injured an indweller. After this experience the crofter was more careful when tethering his pony.

Some Family Brownies.

Space will not allow of my enumerating all the Brownies that attached themselves to Highland families; and so I have selected five—the Brownie at Castle Lachlan, the Brownie at Ardincaple, the Cara Brownie, the MacKays' Brownie, and the Brownie that dwelt in the house of Sir Norman MacLeod of Berneray, in the Sound of Harris.

Castle Lachlan, home of MacLachlan of MacLachlan, situated by the shore of Loch Fyne, still has its brownie, they say. He is described as being scantily clad at all times; and on cold, wintry nights, when the Castle's inmates are abed, he may be seen seated in front of the kitchen grate, warming himself at the glowing embers.

It may have been the Brownie of Castle Lachlan who, according to Highland story, toured the bedrooms at least once every night during the winter months, in order to see that the sleeping inhabitants were adequately covered up.

On the small island of Inch, near Easdale, in Argyll, dwelt the Brownie of the MacDougalls of Ardincaple. This

Brownie followed the family's activities with interest and affection. His special interest was the care of the MacDougalls' cattle on the island. If at night the milk-maid neglected to leave for him a little warm milk in the hollow of the knocking-stone by the cave in which she was wont to live at shieling-time, in the morning she always found that one of the cattle had fallen over the cliffs to its destruction.

The natives of Easdale were of opinion that the Brownie consorted with an invisible friend, with whom he shared the milk placed for him in the stone, since the hollow held from one to three Scots pints, and the entire libation was always gone ere morning. They could not believe it possible that a single Brownie could consume so much milk!

The Cara Brownie.

A little to the south of Gigha, an island some little distance off the western shore of Kintyre, lies the islet of Cara. On this islet once stood an ancient house that belonged to the MacDonalds of Largie; and in that house there resided a Brownie, the special guardian of the family and its fortunes. Like all other creatures of his kind, the Cara Brownie subsisted largely, if not entirely, on milk and cream. Unlike his kindred, however, he had a great ill-will at the Campbells. In pristine days, when the MacDonalds inhabited the old Castle of Largie, situate above the Kintyre shore, there was a Brownie that showed great affection for the family; and it is commonly believed in Argyll that, when Largie Castle was deserted for Cara, the Brownie flitted thither with the rest of the household.

The particular function of the Cara Brownie was to make preparations for the arrival of strangers or guests. He aired the beds, and changed the bed-linen when necessary: he saw to it that no dirty dishes nor clothes were left unattended to over night: at bed-time he took upon himself the responsibility for seeing that all the dogs were out of the house, and tied up at their respective kennels. He stumbled purposely over the water-stoups lying about during the night, as a hint to those who carelessly had left them. And he had a habit

Brownie-haunted Isle of Cara as viewed in autumn-time from Gigha. In the background lies Kintyre.

Ebb tide at the Minister's Creek, Isle of Gigha, with the Rev. Dr Kenneth MacLeod in his boat—"the most distinguished faery of modern times."

"Facing P. 48

The Doune of Rothiemurchus.

The Kintyre shore in autumn from the uplands of Gigha.

[*Facing P.* 49

of giving a sharp skelp in the dark to any inmate guilty of dirtiness or untidiness about the house. Indeed, it is less than half a century since persons were alive in Argyll who deponed to their having received a flick or two at the hands of the meticulous Brownie.

On one occasion a man was taken out of his bed, and did not realise it until he woke to find himself standing stark naked before the smouldering fire. On another occasion a herdswoman, delayed one evening in setting out to bring the cows home, could not locate them. When she returned to the steading, she found them duly tied up in the byre. For both of these strange happenings the Brownie of Cara was deemed responsible.

This Brownie, it is said, has neither been seen nor heard on the mainland of Kintyre since the modern residence was built. But he is still heard on the islet of Cara. In truth, Dr. Kenneth MacLeod, parish minister of Gigha, assures me that, whenever he crosses from Gigha to Cara, he always makes a point of paying his respects to the Brownie, and of sitting in quietude for several minutes in the Brownie's chair, whence he derives inspiration.

The Little One of Kintyre.

The MacDonalds of Largie were not the only family in Kintyre ministered to by a Brownie, since a family named MacKay, also living on this peninsula, had a guardian of this order, who throughout the countryside was known as the Little One, and who is said to have maintained an active interest and participation in the family's affairs up till about the middle of the nineteenth century. When Colonel MacKay went off to the Peninsular War, the Little One accompanied him. Through some of the fiercest episodes of that campaign the Colonel came unscathed; and, when the War was ended, the surviving soldiers returning to Scotland used to describe how the Colonel could be seen riding into battle with the Little One perched on the peak of the saddle in front of him, warding off the bullets that showered down about him.

At the conclusion of hostilities, Colonel MacKay and the

Little One returned home to Kintyre, where the latter again took up his residence with the family, once more applying himself to the domestic routine to which he had been accustomed prior to his accompanying the Colonel overseas. He now added to his duties that of keeping the Colonel's uniform, armaments, and equipment in spick-and-span condition. With unfailing regularity, he quitted the house before daybreak, always letting himself out by the back door. But one wintry night, when the snows lay thickly on Kintyre, Colonel MacKay chanced to come upon the Little One's footprints, blood-stained, which prompted him to ask his wife to look out a pair of shoes for the poor Brownie. This she did. But, being a Sassenach, and therefore ignorant of the swiftness with which even Celtic Brownies take offence, she left on the flagstone at the back door an old pair of shoes that some time previously had been discarded by one of her children. This lack of consideration, as well as of good taste, affected the Little One so grievously that he thereupon withdrew his guardianship from the MacKays; and since that time he has not been seen.

The Brownie of Berneray.

Long ago there dwelt in the house of Sir Norman MacLeod of Berneray, in the Sound of Harris, perhaps the most fascinating of all the Brownies. One evening two of Sir Norman's guests were playing at tables (backgammon). They came to a prolonged pause in their game when one player could not make up his mind as to the next move. Eventually an attendant, who had been watching the game at some distance, came forward and indicated the move that was sure to win the game. As time was dragging on, the contestants agreed to adopt the attendant's suggestion. The hesitating guest then moved accordingly, and won.

When the game was ended, the players asked the attendant whether he had had much experience of tables. Imagine their surprise when he confessed that he never had played in his life, but that he had noticed the Brownie alight for a moment on the vacant square into which the next piece should be played, if the player expected to win!

From Sir Norman MacLeod of Berneray, Martin Martin heard tell of another occasion upon which this Brownie made his presence known. Sir Norman had left his island for Skye, on a visit of indefinite duration. In his absence his servants and other employees assembled one night in the large hall of his residence. One of them, reputed to have been endowed with the second-sight, quite unexpectedly informed the company that it ought to quit the hall without delay, since the place would be required later in the evening by another company. His fellow-servants dismissed the suggestion with the observation that there was very little likelihood that Sir Norman and his entourage would return that night, having regard both to the lateness of the hour, and to the fact that in the darkness the voyage to his island from Skye was beset with so many perils. But the seer maintained his prediction against all argument and reasoning. Within an hour, however, one of Sir Norman's men arrived on the scene, and bade the company provide lights and in other ways render assistance, since their master had just come ashore in the dark.

When, later, Sir Norman MacLeod was told of this prediction, he sent for the seer, that he might question him personally as to its authenticity. The seer answered that on several occasions during the evening he had observed the Brownie enter the hall in human form, and purport to carry to the door an old woman seated by the fire, and that eventually the Brownie ejected her by seizing her by the neck and the heels. When the seer observed this in the hall, it caused him to laugh heartily—and for no reason, so far as his fellow-servants could see! And they concluded, therefore, that the seer's mirth was complete evidence that he was quite daft.

The Eighth Part Measure of a Carle.

The beneficent activities of Sir Norman MacLeod's Brownie recall the following traditional tale connected with the Island of Islay.

In the autumn of 1598, and at the head of Loch Gruinard, in Islay, was fought one of the most sanguinary feuds in

the history of the clans. The participants were Sir James MacDonald of Islay and Sir Lachlan MacLean of Duart, together with their respective clansmen; and the feud has been known ever since as the Battle of Gruinard Bay. According to Gregory [1] and other authorities on matters Highland, thirty MacDonalds were killed, and sixty of them were wounded, whereas death claimed eighty of Sir Lachlan MacLean's near kinsmen, in addition to roughly two hundred other clansmen.

Tradition in Islay has it that a certain tiny fellow of the brownie order, known as the Eighth Part Measure of a Carle, and sometimes as the Black Elf, offered his services in the feud to Sir Lachlan MacLean. But MacLean, himself a valorous chief of giant proportions, contemptuously declined the offer. So the Eighth Part Measure of a Carle, not really minding on which side he fought, then made a like offer to Sir James MacDonald, who immediately accepted his help, only regretting that he did not have the support of a hundred of his kind.

Throughout the conflict, Sir Lachlan remained encased from head to toe in a suit of mail—immune to sword or arrow, as *he* thought. But from the outset of the struggle the Black Elf followed him closely and, on the first occasion on which Sir Lachlan raised the vizor of his helmet, shot into his forehead one of those arrows known as elf-bolts.

Sir James MacDonald expressed both regret at the premature fall of his adversary, and interest in the person who had encompassed it. After the conflict, he made enquiries among his clansmen as to which of them was responsible for it.

Then upspake a tiny creature, whom MacDonald did not recognise. "It was myself," he said, "and a good thing for you, because Lachlan would have killed yourself!"

"What is your name?" enquired MacDonald of the very diminutive figure now standing in front of him.

"I am the Eighth Part Measure of a Carle," he responded, "though they call me the Black Elf throughout your green domains in Islay. And it was better for you

[1] Gregory's *West Highlands and Islands.*

and your clan that you had me with you than against you!"

"In very truth!" concluded Sir James.

Brownies of the Great Glen.

Until comparatively recent times there were several Brownies in Glen Moriston; and they all were renowned for their capacity for work. Farmers observed that, however much corn was put out for them at night, it was all threshed by morning. That occasionally Brownies expected some recompense for their toil is shown by the fact that a Brownie, who used to assist a farmer in Glen Moriston and then deserted, frequently returned to the scene of his former activities during the night-time, and disturbed the farmer's repose by exclaiming at his window:

> "If Brownie wont be getting bread and a hood,
> Brownie will not be working any more."

In the Great Glen of Scotland there were many Brownies; and I have it on reliable authority that some of them still reside there. One of the best known was the little fellow ministering to the needs of the inmates of the Old Castle of Invergarry. Nothing has been heard of him in recent years, however. More than a decade has passed since anyone has seen either the Brownie associated with old Cullachy House, once the residence of the Frasers of Abertarff, or of the Brownie who scoured the pots and pans in old Inchnacardoch House, near Fort Augustus. The Brownie of Cullachy House was known both among mankind and among his own kind for the readiness with which he took offence. His usual mode of showing displeasure was by shifting the furniture about with a great commotion during the small hours, and duly replacing it by daybreak. Not so very long ago, there lived at Fort Augustus a native who knew the Cullachy Brownie intimately, and who was convinced that, by his noisy, nocturnal activities, he manifested his resentment toward strangers, who happened to be sojourning at Cullachy.

Near Moniack Castle there stands a house, now in ruins,

that had a Brownie who demonstrated his disapproval for strangers in like manner.

The Mag Mulloch of Tullochgorm.

That Brownies were as common in the East Highlands as in the West Highlands is shown by the many stories and traditions concerning them to be heard in Moray, and indeed throughout the valley of the Spey. The old house of Tullochgorm, in Spey-side, for example, had its family Brownie. So, too, had the Doune of Rothiemurchus.

The Brownie at Tullochgorm vanished completely when the house came to destruction many generations ago. Unlike most household guardians of his species, this Brownie had exceptionally long hair. In this respect he resembled the *gruagach*. He was referred to locally as the Mag Mulloch. This Brownie was the housekeeper-in-chief of Tullochgorm, so to speak; and he continued to exercise his family guardianship throughout the reign of several generations of owners. The principal duties he took upon himself were his attendance at the laird's table, and the supervision of everything connected with the dairy.

But the Mag Mulloch had a duty less pleasant than these, and that was to escort home the laird of Tullochgorm when, in the small hours, he was heavy in drink. The Brownie, now in the form of a small boy carrying a lantern, could be seen leading his tipsy master home to Tullochgorm over the dark moors, after a night's carousal at the house of some neighbour. The safe conduct of the laird in such circumstances was the Mag Mulloch's chief duty.

According to the author of *Primitive Beliefs in the North-East of Scotland,* the last Brownie in Glenlivet was a female member of the species who, until about the middle of the nineteenth century, resided at the farmhouse of Achnarrow. By reason of the abundance of her hair, she was known as Hairy Meg.

This Brownie had the power of transmitting through the air articles and utensils that were required either during the cooking of a meal, or in the consumption of it. When one day her mistress was entertaining guests, it was observed

that there was no cheese on the table. Scarcely had her mistress mentioned the fact than two large kebbucks came rolling to her feet, and a voice was heard to enquire "Anything else?"

An authority on these matters has identified this Brownie as one of two of the species serving successive households at Tullochgorm. Her male counterpart was sometimes referred to as Brownie Clod, because of his habit of flinging clods at persons whom he disliked, or who failed to observe such domestic regulations and formalities as were conducive to tidiness.

The Brownie of Rothiemurchus.

And now to the Doune of Rothiemurchus, the ancient home of the Grants of Rothiemurchus. The Doune did not always occupy its present site, overlooking fine meadow-lands studded with venerable trees, and facing the hill known as the Ord Ban. It stood on a mound some little distance away. When the family deserted the old home for the new, one member of the household is said to have remained behind. This member was none other than the Brownie, invisible protector of the fortunes of the Grants of Rothiemurchus. At day the Brownie assisted the maids with their domestic duties: at night he sallied forth to tinker the pots and pans, tidy up the fire-places, scald the coggies, and remove soot from the chimneys of the old home. In return for his long and faithful services, he asked for no more than a daily supply of cream—for "a cream-bowl duly set." Long after the household had retired for the night, a clinking and a clonging could be heard in the kitchen. And one night, when the laird of Rothiemurchus had been wakened from his sleep by the Brownie's metallic activities, he groped his way to the stair-head, and yelled in peevish tone to the Brownie: "Stop that infernal din, and let decent folk sleep!"

At sound of the laird's wrath, there fell a tense silence on the kitchen. When the maids rose to their duties in the morning, they found that the Brownie had left his work but half done. Pots and pans, half mended, were strewn about

the kitchen table; and the hearths were as dead fires had left them. Never again was the Brownie seen at Rothiemurchus, though his secret and invisible visits thereafter were said to account for the mysterious disappearance of milk and cream from the dairy. But they say that you may still hear him at his work in the interior of a mound nearby, if you place your ear to it; and there is a belief that in time he will tire of his dudgeon, and revert to his former beneficences.

The mound, on which stood the original home of the Grants, shows signs of its having been the site of a pre-historic structure; and maybe the tradition of some primitive metal-worker dwelling on this site survives in the story of the Brownie who, of nights, tinkered the pots and pans.

In 1843 there was born at Rothiemurchus a baby peculiar in features, with hair unusually long and dark. When an old woman residing in the district came to the Doune to see the new-born child, she exclaimed at first sight of it: "Eh, sirs! it's the brounie come back again!"

A Brownie in the Northern Isles.

Just as in the Highlands and Western Isles, every family of substance in the Orkneys and Shetlands had its Brownie until fairly recent times. Indeed, some families in the Northern Isles claim to have them still! An ancient inhabitant of these Isles, who once brewed ale, and at times read his Bible, was told by a woman in the family that the Brownie was greatly displeased at his reading that particular book. But the brewer of ale went on with his reading, notwithstanding. He was determined not to be put off by the Brownie, nor to discontinue his libation of ale. So, it turned out thereafter that all his brewings were a failure.

A Faery-sprite of Good Works.

Akin to the Brownie was the faery-sprite known as the *loireag,* who supervised the waulking of the cloth in the Isles, and was invisibly present at every process connected

with it. A legend collected at Hacklett, in Benbecula, by Alexander Carmichael shows that the *loireag* also had a partiality for milk and milk produce. If an offering of milk were not left for her in recognition of her services at the weaving and the warping and the fulling of the cloth, she seldom was slow to demonstrate her resentment by placing the milk-giving stock of the township 'under enchantment.'

The *loireag* had a very sensitive ear. When, at the singing of the waulking-song, a woman with a harsh voice sang out of tune, or tended to drown the unison of her neighbours, the *loireag* would be tempted sometimes to remove the warp from the web, and thus render the weaving of no avail. She presided over every process connected with the making of cloth. She was present at the warping and the weaving, at the fulling and the washing and the dyeing; and she was swift to show her anger if the women-folk failed to comply strictly with traditional usages at the cloth-making. If, for instance, the same waulking-song were sung too often at the fulling of the same length of tweed, the *loireag* instantly would render the tweed useless.

A certain Mary MacInnes living in Benbecula decribed the *loireag* to Alexander Carmichael as "a small mite of womanhood, who does not belong to this world, but to the world thither."

The *Loireag* of Ben More.

There was a time when the people of South Uist dreaded the mountain called Ben More, because of the *loireag* that haunted it, and would be putting a spell on all the creatures pastured on its slopes—more especially on goats and cows, for she had a partiality (as have other members of her tribe) for milk and milk produce. Indignant, to be sure, was a crofter living near Ben More, when he found a *loireag* sucking at the udder of his cow in broad daylight, and not the least inclined to quit even when he swore at her. The crofter began to think that there could be no foundation for the belief that the *loireag* was a creature particularly sensitive to swear words, since his swearing had made no

impression upon her at all. She just went on sucking his cow's milk until he flung a stone at her, in the hope of killing her. But the stone nearly killed the innocent cow instead. Then, in the name of St. Columba, protector of cattle, the crofter grasped the tip of one of the cow's horns, with the result that the cow jumped away from the *loireag,* and the *loireag* jumped away from the cow. Up into the corrie of Coradale fled the *loireag,* screaming the while, mocking at the disgruntled crofter of Ben More, and putting a curse upon him and his cow.

Another strange creature of the elfin order was the rock-gnome, who is supposed to have lived in the innermost recesses of the rocks. Now, it was none other than MacVurich Mòr, himself, who was wont to feed the rock-gnomes in Uist. MacVurich Mòr insisted that, whenever there was a baking in his house at Staoligarry, the scraps falling from the baking-board be left for the needy gnomes dwelling among the rocks. " Give a look to it " (that is to say, look on it, but have nothing further to do with it), " for it's many a needy mouth that's waiting on it," MacVurich Mòr would be saying, when he noticed a housewife stooping to pick up the crumbs that dropped on the floor from the baking-board, or sweeping up the scraps that fell about the hearthstone from her girdle.

CHAPTER V

THE GLAISTIG

ONE of the best known tutelary beings in the Highlands and Islands was the Glaistig, a thin, grey woman with yellow hair reaching to her heels, and attired in green raiment. From the colour of her clothes and her somewhat green physiognomy, she became known as the Green Glaistig. Usually she took up her abode at farms where there were cows. She was more than ordinarily amicable toward persons of weak intellect, since she regarded the care of such as her peculiar province; but dogs she hated profoundly.

The Glaistig, moreover, was a creature of singularly solitary habits. Never were two or more of them seen together, nor known to haunt the same place, except when they happened to be the mother-glaistig accompanied by one or more of her young. The Glaistig was noted for the strength of her lungs. She could yell so loudly as to awaken the echo of the most distant hill within sight of her; and, although she was seen but seldom, she was often heard when attending to the cattle, or when arranging utensils in the dairy. Lack of appreciation of her services to the milk-giving stock on the farm where she resided was resented by her in no uncertain manner. And woe betide those who, when milking the cows in the byre or at the summer shielings, omitted to pour out a small quantity of milk for her, or did so grudgingly or with a bad grace!

Scarcely ever was the Glaistig seen, except sometimes when she came at milking-time to partake of her modest share of the milk. The Glaistig inhabitant of Castle Camus, in the Sleat of Skye, who resided there in the days of the Lords of the Isles, could be seen occasionally at night-fall, standing by the stone, in the cavity in which her allowance of milk was placed at milking-time.

The other occasion on which the Glaistig was liable to be

seen was when joy or calamity, such as a marriage or a death, was about to visit the family tenanting the farm-house to which she was attached. On these occasions she emitted a piercing cry of premonition. Only when such a farm-dwelling became deserted finally, or was permitted to fall into ruin, did the Glaistig ever quit the site.

Speaking generally, the Glaistig's occupations and activities were not very different from those of her counterpart, the Brownie. She, also, usually worked at night, redding up the kitchen and generally putting things in order, after the household had retired. When the morning revealed that she had been excessively industrious the previous night, it was regarded as an infallible presage of the coming of strangers.

The Glaistig was strongly addicted to plying spinning-wheels, and to working with artisans' tools whenever they were left about carelessly. Thus it was that old women with religious leanings used to remove the band from the spinning-wheel on Saturday evenings, lest this creature should meddle with the wheel on the Sundays. Workmen disturbed during the night by the Glaistig's industry always had cause to rue her existence, since in the morning they always found their chisels and other instruments so blunted as to be quite useless.

The Glaistig of Inverawe House.

The old mansion of Inverawe House, situated near Loch Etive and familiar to those conversant with Dick Lauder's strange ghost tale, had its Glaistig. She was known as the Maiden of Inverawe. If we accept the testimony of the Rev. J. Gregorson Campbell,[1] she was heard at her domestic duties as recently as the close of the nineteenth century. This Glaistig is said to have been a former mistress of the house, who quarrelled with the family, and who thereafter afflicted both it and its successors at Inverawe House by spilling water-stoups left about overnight, and by deranging the furniture and dislocating the furnishings.

[1] J. G. Campbell's *Superstitions of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.*

The Glaistig at Island House.

Island House, the principal residence on the Isle of Tiree, and so called because of its situation on an emerald islet in a freshwater loch, had a Glaistig in the person of a very little woman with yellow tresses. The islanders spoke of her as the sea-gruagach; but what connection she had with the sea they could not explain. This Glaistig, like other members of her tribe, was seen but seldom. She lived high up in the attics of Island House; and it was customary to lock the door of any apartment in which she could be heard working. When unexpected visitors were about to arrive, this Glaistig worked with unusual diligence, airing the mattresses and bed linen, and generally tidying up those apartments into which visitors were put. She superintended the servants; and on more than one occasion she gave them 'a doing' when they skimped their work.

"A Lump of a Lassie."

The adjoining Island of Coll likewise had its Glaistig. She lived at Breachacha Castle, the stronghold of the MacLeans of Coll in olden times. Her hair was white, and not yellow. It grew in tufts like flax; and it reached down to her ankles. By those who had seen her, she was described as "a lump of a lassie." The MacLeans always knew when to expect guests to arrive at Breachacha since at night the Glaistig disturbed them by her noise in the kitchen.

Now, this Glaistig had one incurable habit—that of so misleading guests, who were obliged to rise in the night-time for one reason or another, that they could not find their way back to bed again. Even to this day folk-tales are told in Coll of the way in which innocent guests at Breachacha Castle were harassed by the Glaistig.

The Ell-maid of Dunstaffnage.

Castle of Dunstaffnage, the ancient residence of the Scottish Kings, where once reposed the Coronation Stone, or Stone of Destiny, had a Glaistig who was spoken of as

the Ell-maid of Dunstaffnage. This Ell-maid habitually apprised the Castle's inmates by the nature of her cries whether an event impending was to be a joyous one or a sorrowful one. Once a stranger came to visit a friend at Dunstaffnage, and was persuaded to tarry the night. But so much did the Ell-maid resent his tarrying that thrice during the night she stripped the bed-clothes off him, and otherwise kept him awake by pacing heavily up and down the corridor adjoining his apartment. Her footfalls, it is said, were as heavy and deliberate as those of a ponderous man.

The Glaistig of Dunollie.

The MacDougalls also had in constant residence at Dunollie a Glaistig, whose particular function was the washing of the family's clothes. Linen and garments left out for her at night, just as boots and shoes are placed outside bedroom doors in hotels, were replaced by waking-time, all beautifully washed, and duly starched and ironed when necessary.

The Glaistig's favourite among the staff of the Castle was MacDougall's *amadan* or fool, to whom she gave exceptional latitude, and whom she often shielded when other members of the household upbraided him. Of evenings this Glaistig could be seen on her way up the steep path that to this day leads from the shore-road to the ivy-clad ruins of Dunollie.

The Water-imp of Lochaber.

Of a disposition less amiable than that of the Glaistigs aforementioned was the water-imp Glaistig, a creature half-woman and half-goat in form, haunting lonely lochs and rivers. In Lochaber there is a tale told of how a certain Big Kennedy of Lianachan encountered such a Glaistig, when on his way home on horseback at dead of night. Having seized her, Big Kennedy placed her in the saddle in front of him, with the belt of his sword securely fastened round her waist. When daybreak came, he reddened his plough-coulter in the fire, and forced the

Glaistig to swear on hot iron that never again would she interfere with any living person in Lochaber as long as the moon shone by night, and the sun by day. On doing as she was bidden, she burnt her hand to the bone. Out through the window she fled with a great shrieking—out through the mists of dawn—to a hillock nearby. There she ejected three squirts of blood from her veins; and with each of them she pronounced a curse on the head of Big Kennedy and on his seed forever.

And they say in Lochaber that, ever since this incident, the vegetation growing on this hillock has maintained the appearance of having been discoloured by the Glaistig's blood.

The Glaistig of Ardnadrochaid.

Not far from Craignure, on the Isle of Mull, is a place called Ardnadrochaid, where lived a family named Lamont. Now these Lamonts were served by a Glaistig who assumed the form of a dog. One day there came across the Sound of Mull from Morven a band of cattle-rievers, intent on 'lifting' such beasts belonging to the Lamonts as their craft could hold. But the Glaistig of Ardnadrochaid observed their landing, and immediately proceeded to drive the live-stock to the hills. At a spot still known as the Heroes' Hollow, where the rievers overtook the herd, the Glaistig struck each animal in turn, transforming it into a grey stone, so as to prevent its falling into the rievers' hands. These stones are to be seen in the Heroes' Hollow to this day; and their number testifies to the magnitude of the herd then owned by the Lamonts.

After this occurrence, the Glaistig pined away and died, though the family showed her every kindness and consideration, and frequently sought to console her for the loss of her cattle. The Lamonts buried her with due reverence down by the Sound of Mull, and in a patch of ground where in olden times it was customary to inter unbaptised children.

The Glaistig of Ardnadrochaid was by no means the only member of her species on the vast Island of Mull. The

MacQuarries of Ulva, for example, had their own Glaistig, who used to attend to the cattle, and always gave vocal warning when livestock got in among the corn or other crops.

Then, a Glaistig had her home in the Ross of Mull. When a cattle-man in this neighbourhood was in the habit of moving the cattle at nightfall, he used to hear an invisible being say to him: "There is a heifer behind you, Son of Big Black John!"

To this the cattle-man, by way of protecting himself against any evil influence, always responded: "If there be one behind me, there's a score in front of me!"

And a local man, who frequently fished off the rocks of the Ross, was followed constantly by the voice of a Glaistig, as he proceeded home each evening with his catch. "Give me a cuddy, Neil!" the Glaistig used to say. Neil observed that the oftener he conceded to the Glaistig's demand, the more frequent and troublesome became her solicitations. Sometimes she pestered him so much when on his way home from fishing that, by the time he reached his own threshold, he had not a single fish left.

An Iona Glaistig.

In the shieling days of Iona when, during the summer months, the inhabitants of the east end and of the west end of that Island were wont to pasture their cows alternately for fourteen days on the common grazing at a spot known as Staonnaig, a Glaistig dwelt in a hollow rock near at hand. For this Glaistig the Iona women at milking-time each evening poured a little milk on what is still pointed out as the Glaistig's Stone.

The story goes that on one occasion this Glaistig came to the house of an old woman in Iona, seeking shelter from a heavy downpour. The old woman, whose name was Livingstone, prepared a meal for her, and bade her dry her wet clothes by the peat-fire. Before the glowing peats stood the Glaistig, extending her clothes to the warmth. Suddenly they caught fire. This so annoyed her that she rendered it impossible thereafter for any woman of the

name of Livingstone to kindle or re-fuel a fire on Iona while a meal stood ready for consumption.

"A Grey Stone overgrown with Lichen."

Not unlike the activities of the Brownie were the activities of the Glaistig that took up her residence at a farmhouse in Glen Duror of Appin, in Argyll. This Glaistig interested herself chiefly in the Glen Duror cattle; and she regarded it as her especial duty to prevent the calves from suckling their mothers during the night.

This Glaistig did not follow the tenants of the farm from place to place. The farmhouse in Glen Duror was her permanent residence. Incoming tenants were told of her by those outgoing, and were handed over to her charge—certainly so far as the milk-giving stock was concerned. This Glaistig, it is said, was alive as late as 1870, and may still be alive for all we know! Those who claimed to having seen her described her facial expression as resembling "a grey stone overgrown with lichen."

Every evening for several generations a small quantity of milk was poured into a stone for this Glaistig; and this stone is still referred to in Duror of Appin as the *Clach na Glaistig,* the Glaistig's Stone. But there came to the farmhouse in course of time a new tenant who omitted to supply this offering, with the result that next morning the calves were found among the cows (where God meant them to be!), and there was no milk in their udders for the porridge.

When a servant lassie at this farm was asked whether she had any fear of giving displeasure to the Glaistig, she ridiculed the idea. The result was that, when she was proceeding to a stream nearby to obtain a pailful of water in the dark, she received a sharp slap on the cheek that gave a twist to her neck. Howbeit, when on the same errand the following evening, she received another slap on the other cheek that corrected the twist!

A Strathglas Glaistig.

Upon a time the home of Mac 'ic Alasdair in Strathglas was haunted by a Glaistig, who was never seen, but who

every night washed and dried the dishes, and arranged them in their proper places. About a hundred years ago there came to Strathglas from Morven a shepherd, for whom the Glaistig took a great liking, and with whom she insisted on residing. At times the shepherd found his unsolicited mate very aggravating. She would pull the coverlet off his bed in the small hours, and giggle superciliously in so doing. When, for instance, he placed his jacket on a dyke while working in the open, he would return to the spot to find the jacket gone. But, if he returned a second time, the jacket lay on the dyke, just as he had left it. Milk and cheese on occasions used to disappear from the dairy of Mac 'ic Alasdair, but never for long at a time. And it was believed that this was one of the Glaistig's ways of annoying the family. So, the household resorted to all manner of devices to counteract her influences. Sometimes they nailed a sprig of holly above the door of the dairy : sometimes they deposited a Bible on the lintel. But often these precautions were of no avail.

The doings of this Glaistig, who always remained invisible, were so well recognised that occasionally groups of people used to visit the house of Mac 'ic Alasdair in Strathglas to witness her performances, and to listen to the strange noises that emanated from all sorts of queer corners when she went rampaging through the house in churlish mood. One night, as a number of men from a neighbouring farm came in, the pot suddenly left the swee, and dropped down on the kitchen floor, before their very eyes !

In later years the Glaistig and the household became reconciled. Thereafter she devoted herself to assisting with its everyday duties, and in coming to its succour when adversity befell.

CHAPTER VI

THE WATER-HORSE AND KINDRED MONSTERS

ALTHOUGH to-day belief in the existence of the *each-uisge*, or water-horse, seems to have disappeared completely, it is only the matter of a few decades since every locality of the Highlands and Islands was reputed to possess a loch haunted by such a creature. The prevalence of this belief is attested by the number and variety of the folk-tales still told of the water-horse and its sinster activities. There is scarcely a district of Celtic Scotland that does not have its water-horse tradition.

Similarly, belief in the existence of the *tarbh-uisge*, or water-bull, has waned, though at no time did this creature occupy so much of the attention of the natives as did the water-horse.

The idea that lochs, such as Loch Hourn and Loch Awe, were the abode of some fearsome creature of monstrous dimensions has been revived in our own time by the recent graphic descriptions given by independent eye-witnesses of the world-famous Loch Ness Monster.

Shieling of the One Night.

In a fertile glen not far distant from the village of Shawbost, in the west of Lewis, there lies a shieling that for more than a century has gone by a Gaelic name meaning the Shieling of the One Night. This shieling was started by a couple of families who agreed to sharing equally their rights in it. One evening in June, just at the commencement of shieling-time, two cousins in their early twenties, known locally as Fair Mary and Dark Mary, occupied the shieling for the first time since its erection. Having milked their cows and put in a spell at the churning, they sat in the low doorway of their summer dwelling, singing and knitting until the hour for retiring.

As they were putting a light on the cruisie, there came to

the shieling a woman, on whom they had no acquaintance. She professed weariness of body and mind, and asked a night's hospitality. There seemed nothing unusual about her mein, since she was clad in the customary dress of the Lewis peasant woman, and spoke with such intimacy of the neighbouring countryside that the two Maries saw no reason to deny her the traditional hospitality of the Isles.

Now, as a rule, two-thirds of the interior of a shieling are occupied by a bed, which generally consists of a shake-down of straw or of heather. After a simple repast, the Maries and their guest retired for the night. At dawn of day, however, Dark Mary awoke with a fright, and felt a warm trickle by her side. Up she leapt in great horror to discover the guest gone, and a stream of blood flowing from the breast of her cousin, who now was dead.

On forcing open the rude doorway of the shieling, she noticed a horse trotting away and away toward the greying of the day. No explanation seemed necessary now. The horse was nothing more or less than the dreaded *each-uisge,* or water-horse, to which she and her dead cousin, Fair Mary, had unwittingly offered hospitality the previous evening, believing her to have been a woman, footsore, and genuinely seeking a night's portion.

The corpse of the water-horse's victim, they say in Lewis, was interred on the slope to the east of this shieling of unhappy memory, the tumble-down shell of which is still to be seen. Never since has this shieling been occupied. Hence the ominous name by which it is known to this day—Shieling of the One Night.

THE WHITE HORSE OF SPEY.

Perhaps the most fitful and unreliable of all our Scottish rivers is the Spey. Its floods and spates are proverbial; and historical records of the destruction they have wrought to life and property show that there is a touch of modesty in the old saying that computes the Spey's demand at one life a year. In this respect, however, the Spey is regarded as being less rapacious than the Dee—

"Ravenous Dee
Yearly takes three!"

The Spey at Fochabers, haunt of the White Horse of Spey.

Ben Cruachan and a glimpse of Loch Awe from the Inveraray road, and under conditions when the Great Monster of Loch Awe usually is heard.
[*See P.* 81

The Great Moor, stretching from the Back o' Keppoch to the Smooth Mile at Morar, where the Spectre of Colann the Headless used to be seen.

[*See P.* 84

Sheen-white Sands at Morar in autumn.

[*Facing P.* 69

Among the folks of Spey-side there was an ancient belief that the loss of life by drowning in that river was due to the alluring machinations of the White Horse of Spey, a creature described by them as a beautiful beast to the sight, but in reality a kelpie of ill-doing. Seldom during good weather was the White Horse seen, or was there any evidence of its evil existence. But on boisterous nights, when thunders pealed among the Cairngorms and the Hills of Cromdale, his whinnying was often heard, and his form almost as frequently seen. And it was his custom in circumstance of storm, they say, to accost benighted pedestrians and assure them of safe escort to their destination. By the side of the footsore wanderer he would walk, until the former became so overcome with fatigue as to accept gladly the offer of being conveyed astraddle for the remainder of his journey. Once a-mount the White Horse of Spey, the rider's fate was sure, for the fearsome creature then galloped off at break-neck pace, and plunged into the deep pools of the Spey, carrying with him the rider who, by some power of magic, remained fixed immovably to its back.

Tradition in Spey-side has it that the White Horse claimed innumerable victims in this way; and of the exultant song sung by the White Horse, in his death-dash, the following fragment has been handed down to us:

> "And ride weel, Davie,
> And by this night at ten o'clock
> Ye'll be in Pot Cravie."[1]

In her charming book, *The Secret of Spey,* Wendy Wood gives another fragment of the White Horse's song, which she picked up locally:

> "Ride you;
> Ride me,
> Kelpie,
> Creavie!"

Yet another version of the kelpie's song is given by a Cairney contributor to the official journal of the Banff Field

[1] *Primitive Beliefs in the North-East of Scotland* (MacPherson).

Club in 1884. "I remember, when children," writes this contributor, "we used to be told that the water-kelpie would sing to the poor, deluded ones he managed to entice away:

> "Sit weel, Janety, or ride weel, Davie,
> For this time the morn ye'll be in Pot Cravie."

The Kelpie of Braemar.

In Braemar there lived a kelpie that made love to the women of the countryside. On one occasion this kelpie took a fancy to a woman residing by the mill of Quoich. When her meal ran out, the kelpie enabled her to obtain a further supply.

One morning, as the kelpie was leaving the mill with a sack of meal on his back, the miller intercepted him. Close at hand lay a stone whorl, such as in olden times was to be found at each mill, and was fixed to the spindle when the mill was not working, in order to prevent the faeries from setting the mill in motion. This whorl the miller pitched at the kelpie; and, in so doing, he delivered himself thus: "Kelpie, or nae kelpie, God damn ye! I'll break yer leg!"

In this wise the miller broke the kelpie's leg, whereupon it fell headlong into the mill lade, and was drowned.

Then, there was the kelpie inhabiting the deep pools of the Strichen Burn, in Aberdeenshire. This creature could assume human form. A traveller crossing the Burn once heard a voice as if someone near at hand were addressing him. On turning round, he found an old man darning a pair of trousers. For some reason or other, he struck the old man, who now reverted to the form of a horse, and went neighing into the pool, where he disappeared.

The Kelpie's Stane.

By the Bridge of Luib, on the River Don, is a boulder known to the natives as the Kelpie's Stane. It happened that a man summoned to the death-bed of a relative came to this crossing-place just after torrential floods had carried away the bridge. When he was on the point of abandoning all hope of reaching the opposite bank, a tall man appeared

from nowhere, and volunteered to carry him across. The distracted homecomer accepted the assistance proffered. But, when he and his carrier reached mid-river, the latter reverted to the form of the river kelpie, and endeavoured to drag him down to the river's bed. The victim managed to escape. As he scrambled to the bank, the infuriated kelpie hurled after him the huge boulder that to this day goes by the name of the Kelpie's Stane.

Two Beneficent Kelpies.

It would appear from the folk-tales and traditions of these parts, however, that the activities of the river kelpie were not always of a wicked nature. There is a story of a young man who accidentally was drowned in the Don, at Inverurie. When all ordinary means of recovering his corpse had failed, a local woman of uncanny disposition suggested that a soft biscuit be thrown into the river at the point where the fatality had occurred. This was done. When the biscuit, in being borne downstream, reached the point below which lay the corpse, it rapidly sank. The gift of the biscuit appeased the spirit of the river, who meanwhile had been keeping the body in thrall. Thus it was that the corpse was allowed to come up to the surface, whence it was recovered.

In a similar manner the body of MacFarquhar of the Wand was recovered. MacFarquhar, who was a basket-maker to trade and thus received his by-name, slipped into the Linn o' Dee, and was drowned. All search for the body having proved unsuccessful, his widow knelt by the river bank, and prayed to the river deity to deliver her dead man to her. She then threw his plaid into the river, and quitted the scene of her sorrow. By the edge of the Linn she found her husband's corpse in the morning, reverently enshrouded in his plaid.

The method of locating a body lost in water by means of floating bread was once employed widely—and, indeed, may still be. It was quite a usual custom to make a hollow in a loaf of bread, fill the hollow with mercury, and then set the loaf adrift where the body was thought to lie. When

the loaf arrived at the spot below which the body would be found, it ceased to travel, oscillated for a moment or two, as does the needle of a compass, and then indicated the spot by a dipping motion. Mark Twain, in his fascinating books dealing with life on the Mississippi, alludes to this method of finding drowned corpses in America.

The Black Steed of Loch Pityoulish.

Reminiscent of the White Horse of Spey is the story of the black steed of Loch Pityoulish, a picturesque loch situated between the Spey and the foot-hills of the Cairngorms. Local tradition is insistent that the loch harbours some dreaded monster, and that no one bathing in its water should ever allow his head to become submerged. This tradition may have emanated from the sunken crannog or lake-dwelling of pre-historic times, the site of which one may see on a calm, clear day, deep down below the surface of the loch.

In any case, the inhabitants of Kincardine regarded the crannog as a submerged castle; and with it they associated all sorts of queer and eerie beliefs.

On a day when the heir to the Barony of Kincardine was playing with his young friends by the shore of Loch Pityoulish, their attention was drawn to a beautiful steed grazing near at hand, harnessed with a silver saddle, silver bridle, and silver reins. In great excitement all the boys grasped the reins, whereat the black steed galloped off into the loch, dragging them with him. Only the heir to the Barony came home to tell the tale, since, as it happened, he was able to free himself by severing his rein-fast fingers with a knife he carried. Since that day the folks of Kincardine have been wary of the water-horse inhabiting the sunken crannog in Loch Pityoulish.

A Water-horse Disturbed by Boulders.

At the base of one of the mountain passes in the Uig district of Skye lies a dark lochan that long had been the

abode of a water-horse. One day a herd laddie, in meandering through the pass, tarried awhile to amuse himself by rolling into this lochan huge boulders that were lightly poised on an overhanging precipice, and watching the great splashes and waves caused by their falling. Suddenly he observed more commotion than could have been produced by the dislodged boulders, whereupon there emerged from the disturbed waters a black steed. This was nothing else than the water-horse. Instantly the laddie crouched behind a boulder, and the fearsome creature now climbed out of the water, and stood for a moment on the bank, apparently looking round for the intruder. But the laddie remained in concealment; and so the water-horse returned to the depths of the lochan, and has never been seen since that day.

A Skye Widow's Strange Experience.

Once there lived at Vaterstein, in the west of Skye, an agéd woman, whose daughter had been ailing for some time. At length the daughter died; and all alone with the corpse in her dark, eerie home was the old woman left. If you should visit this uncanny spot on a dark night, you will be able to judge for yourself how lonely and solitary the old mother must have felt during the long nights when lamps were unknown in Skye, and when only the meagrest artificial light could be produced. Well, one night as she sat mourning her loss—so the story goes—who should enter her sorrowful home but a man whom she knew not! He seated himself beside her; and, whenever the fire would be getting low, he would strike it with his magic stick, and say: "*O chaorain, dean solus!* O little peat, make a light!" These were the days when the folks of Skye, and indeed of the Highlands and Hebrides generally, believed implicitly in the existence of the *each-uisge,* or water-horse, a creature that had the power of assuming human form when occasion required. And the folks of Vaterstein were convinced it was the water-horse that all night long had sat with the lonely and bereaved widow, and vanished with the first flush of day.

THE WATER-HORSE IN BRACADALE.

The Bracadale district of Skye boasted at least one water-horse. The maidens, who used to attend the old-time shieling up on the slopes of the Shadowy Hill, in Trotternish, had rather an uncomfortable experience. At nightfall they had lain down to rest on their big bed of heather and bracken; and, just as they were falling asleep, they heard a voice without, saying: "*Leigibh an stigh mi, a chloinn gaolach!* Let me in, you belovèd children!" And the maiden, who rose to answer the stranger at the door, was then asked by a feeble and worn cratur: "*C'aite an cadail cailleachag an nochd?* Where will sleep the little old woman to-night?"

"She will sleep at the feet of the maidens," replied the shieling lassie who let her in.

"Oh, but the beast of the feet will take hold of me!" answered the frail woman. When she was offered a place behind the maidens, she replied that she was equally terrified of the beast that haunted the back of the bed. As there remained no alternative, the old woman was alloted a place in the centre of the *leapa mhor na h-airidh*—in the centre of the big, shieling bed; and ere long heavy sleep was on all its tired occupants.

But the maiden nearest to the door of the shieling bothy was conscious that the frail woman was suspiciously restless, and that she slept very spasmodically. Soon she felt the old woman crawling toward her; and, on turning round, she observed that she had her teeth in the arm of the maiden lying next to her.

What was the old woman but the water-horse in disguise!

Up the observant maiden rose, and fled as quickly as her legs could bear her. But this ugly creature pursued her with a terrific shrieking, having now assumed his true form. Eventually they came to a little stream that to this day runs between Totarder and Balgowan, and in the locality of Bracadale church. Over the stream leapt the terror-stricken maiden, just as the cock began to crow in Balgowan, the Smith's Hamlet. Now, this cock's crowing meant the

saving of the girl's life, since it acted as a spell on the enraged water-horse, who thus was hindered from crossing the stream. In this wise the maiden escaped to her home; but the water-horse cried after her: "*Duilich e, duilich e, alltan!* Sad it is, sad it is, streamlet!"

And to this day the little stream flowing by the church of Bracadale goes by the name of the *Alltan Duilich*, the Difficult Streamlet.

Betrayed by Strands of Seaweed.

A somewhat similar folk-tale is told about a Lewis shieling, to the *bothan* or hut of which hirpled a beautiful, young woman who complained of weariness. But the shieling girls became suspicious of her when it was noticed that the hair of the alms-seeker was full of sand and gravel and dried strands of seaweed. They concluded, therefore, that in reality she was an *each-uisge*.

Traces of seaweed in the hair frequently led to the identification of the water-horse. John Bellenden, the esteemed Archbishop of Moray, had more than a mere nodding acquaintance with the water-horse; and from Barry's *History of the Orkney Islands* (1805) we learn that, besides having the likeness of a young horse, this weird creature is often "covered all over with seaweed."

In the folk-lore of the Spey valley there are frequent references to the way in which women, on whom the kelpie had bestowed his affections, eventually discovered the true nature of their admirer, when they perceived in his hair a fragment of rush or of goose-grass.

A Legend of the Monach Isles.

Lying to the west of North Uist is a group of islands known as the Monach Isles, where a dwindling population still recounts fragments of legendary lore, much of which is associated with the "Lost Continent," of which these particular islands, no doubt, formed a part. Adjoining the dwellings on the island of the group called Ceann Ear is the Loch of the Virtues (*Loch nam Buadh*), which for centuries was regarded as the abode of a water-horse.

The water-horse in question was a monster among a race of monsters. Often had the Monach folks deliberated as to how they might rid themselves of his evil presence; but all their schemings came to nought. Calamity followed upon calamity, until at last they resolved to abandon Monach. Thereupon upspake a native woman named NicLeoid, who urged that for some years she had been feeding and pampering a powerful bull in the hope that one day he might prove more than a match for the *each-uisge* dwelling in the Loch of the Virtues. So the Monach people decided to postpone its exodus until NicLeoid's bull had been given an opportunity of demonstrating his prowess.

At length NicLeoid led her bull forth to do battle. While he grazed by the margin of the lake, she stood some little distance away, waiting every moment for the appearance of the water-horse. Soon the bull became restive: soon he commenced to tear at the sod with hoof and horn, roaring the while in expectation of the tussle with the foe. Covered with weeds and mud, the water-horse emerged from the lake; and the contest began. The bull was more at home on dry land than was the water-horse, who soon began to retreat strategically toward the water's edge again. The bull, alas! over-confident of victory, followed him too far. He was out as of his element in water as the water-horse had been on dry land when the combat commenced. And so great was the commotion of the water caused by the struggle, that only occasionally could the Monach folks get even a glimpse either of the bull or of the water-horse; and even then no more than a horn or a hoof could be seen.

Suddenly the commotion ceased. The troubled waters now gradually settled down. All became silent, and it was plain that matters were ended.

On the following day there floated ashore a pair of lungs; but so mutilated were they that the natives could not tell whether they had belonged to the bull or to the water-horse. But it is said that to this very day one may trace by the margin of *Loch nam Buadh* the marks made on the sod by hoof and horn, when NicLeoid's bull was spoiling for the fight.

This folk-tale is reminiscent of a similar one about the

The Coolins of Skye, and the Road to Carbost and Talisker.

The Old Harbour of Scarinish, Isle of Tiree.

[*Facing P.* 76

Loch Tulla and the Clachlet from a point on the New Road to Glen Coe between Bridge of Orchy and Achallader.

A corner of Loch Hourn in early winter—haunt of the Three-Legged Monster.

[*See P.* 82

water-horse haunting a loch in the Morven district of Argyll, where the liver of one of its victims came ashore the day after nine children had been carried off by this evil creature. The story goes that some children, nine in number, were playing by a loch near Sunart, in Morven, when they came upon a horse that appeared so docile as to tempt all of them to mount it at the same time. Into the loch with its nine young riders dashed the horse. Not one of the children was ever seen again, though a child's liver was washed ashore the following day.

This tale, with local variations, is often told to children throughout the Highland countryside, so as to restrain them from getting too close to, or from interfering with, horses.

Loch Arkaig's Water-horse.

Loch Arkaig, that historic and romantic sheet of fresh water in Prince Charlie's Country, is not without its record of a water-horse. As recently as 1857 it was seen. In that year, Lord Malmesbury wrote in his *Memoirs:* "My stalker, John Stuart at Achnacarry, has seen it twice, and both times at sunrise in summer, when there was not a ripple on the water. The creature was basking on the surface; he saw only the head and hind-quarters, proving that its back was hollow, which is not the shape of any fish, or of a seal. Its head resembled that of a horse. The Highlanders are very superstitious about this creature. They believe that there is never more than one in existence at the same time."

The Fate of John MacInnes in Glen Elg.

Associated with a lochan near a place called Suardalan, in Glen Elg, is the following story of a water-horse, that was told to me by Mrs MacTaggart during a happy and memorable sojourn with her and her family at the Old Manse of Glen Elg, a few years ago. One day a local man named John MacInnes noticed by the edge of the lochan what he took to be a fine horse. For some reason or other, he enquired of a sage in the district whether he might appropriate the animal for his own use. The sage replied that he thought MacInnes should take the horse with him,

if he felt he could give an undertaking that he would put a blessing on the creature, and that under no circumstances would he ever attempt to mount it.

John MacInnes accordingly took the horse with him; and it worked well to its new owner. A day came, however, when the animal seemed so docile that MacInnes, foot-weary with walking continually between the ploughing-field and his home, decided that he would mount the horse, contrary to the stipulation he had made with the sage. And no sooner had he done so than the creature reverted to its real form—that of the dreaded water-horse! With MacInnes astraddle, it went whinnying into the lochan. And that was the last the Glen Elg folks saw of John MacInnes.

The Dragging of Loch nan Dubhrachan.

Perhaps the most memorable incident connected with the water-horse in the Highlands of Scotland was the dragging of a loch in Skye with a view to capturing this evil monster. Between Knock and Isle Oronsay, in the Sleat of Skye, is a loch called Loch nan Dubhrachan. So persistent in the neighbourhood were stories of the manner in which "a beast" inhabiting this loch sought to waylay islanders, who dared to pass by at night-time, that eventually it was decided to drag the loch with a large net. This was actually carried out in the year, 1870. But the animal astutely evaded capture. During the dragging operations, however, the net became entangled with some object under water. This so terrified both spectators and those engaged in dragging the net on opposite sides of the loch that they all fled to their homes, convinced that at long last they had proved the existence of the water-horse.

In 1932 I visited an old man named John MacRae, who lived in a cottage by the steading, within earshot of the Old Manse of Glen Elg, and who, as a boy at Isle Oronsay, witnessed the attempt to capture this water-horse. So noisy in spate was the burn at the end of John MacRae's cottage that at times I used to find conversation with him quite an undertaking, even when the door was closed. But I

managed to take down from him a most interesting verbatim account of the dragging of Loch nan Dubhrachan.[1]

The dragging of Loch nan Dubhrachan recalls a traditional attempt to drain a "bottomless" loch situated in the neighbourhood of Tomintoul, in the uplands of Banff. This loch was haunted by a kelpie, who was believed to have been responsible for the mysterious disappearance from early times of innumerable persons. When the men of Strathdon assembled, and commenced to drain the water away, a terrifying shriek came from the depths of the loch, and a little man, with a flaming red bonnet on his head, made his appearance. The men of Strathdon immediately fled in panic, leaving their implements behind them.

The Water-Bull.

Akin to the *each-uisge*, or water-horse, was the *tarbh-uisge*, or water-bull. Unlike the water-horse, however, the water-bull was of a harmless disposition. It inhabited lonely tarns among the hills, and made its appearance only at night-time. When seen, which was seldom, it usually was grazing with ordinary, domestic cattle. It was believed in the Highlands that calves born with ears that were short, and that looked as though they had been indented with a knife, were the offspring of the water-bull. The creature itself had no ears at all; and thus it was explained how such calves were what was termed 'knife-eared' or 'half-eared.' At dark the strange lowing of the water-bull might be heard by some lonely lochan, as it emerged to graze with ordinary cattle.

There is a folk-tale told in Lorne of how a dairy-maid and a cattle-man, when on the point of leaving for the night the fold where the cows had been collected after milking-time, noticed a small, black, bull-shaped animal, velvety and soft in appearance, approaching the cows. Its bellowing they described as one of the weirdest sounds to which they ever had listened. It was "like the crowing of a cock." On hearing it, they fled in panic. But, when they returned to

[1] For this account, see my book, *Somewhere in Scotland*, p. 155.

the fold at morning, they found that no harm whatever had befallen the cows. So they concluded that the strange visitor of the previous evening must have been the *tarbh-uisge*.

A Water-bull Slain on St. Kilda.

The water-bull of Lorne reminds one of the story of the St. Kildan woman who was descending the hollow behind the village with a creel of peats, when a tiny door opened in the side of a conical mound. With great presence of mind, the woman stuck a knife into the ground close to the tiny door. And, as she gazed into the interior of the mound, behold! a speckled cow came out and dropped a speckled calf. And in due course this speckled calf grew up to be a speckled cow; and this speckled cow gave birth to a speckled calf without ears.

Highland tradition, as I have mentioned elsewhere, says that the progeny of the water-bull inhabiting innumerable lochans is easily distinguishable because of its having no ears at all, or very, very short ones.

High up on the Mullach Sgar of St. Kilda is a lochan marked on Mathieson's map, the site of which I could not locate during my stay on St. Kilda at the time when it was evacuated, owing to the fact that it exists only in winter-time. But the natives used to tell the story of how a man, passing by this tarn at a time remote, slew the water-bull with a bow and arrow.

On Boreray Isle, one of the St. Kilda group, is an ancient structure called Stallar House, of the origin of which little is known. But the old folks used to affirm that one, Stallar, headed a rebellion against the steward of St. Kilda, which, considering how he oppressed the natives until about eighty years ago, was not surprising. Stallar is said to have retired to Boreray with sixteen persons, and to have lived in the ancient dwelling still identified with his name.

On an occasion on which the St. Kildans were living in Stallar House during the annual fowling and 'rueing' excursion, they were threatened with a shortage of provisions. And, no sooner had one of their number

expressed the desire that he might have the killing of the fattest of Clan Ranald's oxen, than a lowing was heard outwith the dwelling.

"Your wish has been granted," said one (in the Gaelic, of course) to the member of the party who had referred to the fattest ox. "Go out and kill him!" The wisher, however, was too terrified to venture out; but on the morrow the St. Kildans observed the marks of cloven hoofs on the grassy slopes around Stallar House. What were these but the marks of the water-bull?

A Breadalbain Tradition.

Several lochans in Breadalbain are reputed to have been the abode of the water-bull. On Morenish Hill there is one such lochan that to this day is known to the older inhabitants of Loch Tay-side by a Gaelic name signifying its association with this elusive creature. In the days when the Highland crofters held the Morenish pastures in common, and were accustomed to send their cows off to its remoter grazings at shieling-time, the black, curly hair and short ears of all the calves born in the locality were attributed to the water-bull, who was seen by the inhabitants but seldom, but of the existence of which they all were convinced.

Within living memory, I am told, the water-bull was seen on the Isle of Gigha; but no mortal eye has beheld it since the day it deserted one lochan on the island for another.

The Great Monster of Loch Awe.

The monster that in our own time is said to inhabit Loch Ness is by no means the first creature of its kind to astonish the Highland countryside. There is a tradition that for centuries Loch Awe was the home of a twelve-legged monster, which was heard oftener than seen. Judging by some accounts, it resembled the diplodoccus of ancient times. But, even among those who claimed to have seen it, opinions differed considerably as to its appearance. Some maintained it was like a great horse: others described it as a gigantic eel.

This creature was noisiest in time of hard frost. When

Loch Awe became frozen over, it could be heard in the act of breaking up the ice by its powerful and irresistible movements. "There's the Big Monster, cracking the ice," the inhabitants of Loch Awe-side used to whisper one to another.

The Loch Oich Monster.

There is a tradition in the Great Glen of Scotland, and indeed in Inverness-shire generally, that a strange beast inhabits the depths of Loch Oich; but, although many of the natives and not a few travellers profess to having seen it, the existence of this beast has been overshadowed somewhat in recent years by its more famous neighbour in Loch Ness. According to the *Northern Chronicle,* which is published weekly at Inverness, a close view of the creature was obtained on August, 13th, 1936, by Alderman A. J. Richards, his son, and a friend. Alderman Richards is a member of Camberwell Borough Council, and is headmaster of Evydale Road Public School, London. So we may take it that he is a man who scarcely would go out of his way to haver on a matter of this kind. The Alderman and his companions were boating at the Laggan end of Loch Oich, when "a weird-looking creature" emerged. "First two humps, like the coils of a snake, appeared only a dozen yards from the boat. Then the head appeared; and so close were we that we could see it was shaggy, and like that of a dog." The coils were estimated to have been three feet in height, three feet in length, and about three feet apart, with the head the same distance away. In colour the beast was almost black.

As Loch Oich is a comparatively small loch, it has been suggested that the identity of the strange creature dwelling in its depths might be established quite easily by an intensive dragging with a steel net. The Editor of the Inverness newspaper just referred to wonders whether the Fishery Board could not be persuaded to undertake the task.

The Three-legged Monster of Loch Hourn.

To this day the folks residing about Loch Hourn believe that loch to be haunted by a monster, to which they refer as the Wild Beast of Barrisdale. Less than sixty years ago

there lived at Barrisdale, by the shores of Loch Hourn, a crofter who once encountered this monster. He assured his neighbours that this ungainly creature had gigantic wings, and was three-legged. He often saw it in flight across the hills of Knoydart, especially about Barrisdale itself; and he averred that on one occasion, when it was making for him with evil design, he rushed for the shelter of his cottage. As the crofter himself used to relate up until the time of his death, he just succeeded in slamming the door in the monster's face.

The dwellers by the more remote shores of Loch Hourn frequently heard the terrifying roar of the Wild Beast of Barrisdale; and an old man living in this locality, called Ranald MacMaster, ofttimes discovered the tracks of this three-legged creature on the hills, and also about the sandy stretches fringing Barrisdale Bay.

Beast of the Charred Forests.

Hundreds and hundreds of years ago most of the Northern Highlands and of the Outer Hebrides was impenetrable forest. Tradition has it, as I have mentioned elsewhere, that, in order to monopolise the timber trade, the Scandinavians fired the woods of the Outer Hebrides. And, again, it is said that, with a view to reducing the likelihood of their being set upon by the natives lying in ambush, the Norsemen burned the woods, that they might be able to observe any enemy advancing at a distance.

In Sutherland the destruction of the ancient forests is laid to the charge of a fierce and powerful monster, which roamed over the north of Scotland, breathing fire wheresoever he went. As proof of this, the more elderly inhabitants point yet to the charred stumps of pine-trees embedded in the peat-mosses. The entire populace fled for safety whenever the monster was reported to be stalking the land. He came to be known among the folks of Sutherland as the Beast of the Charred Forests.

" Pity on you, Dornoch ! " roared the monster, as he came within sight of the spire of St. Gilbert's Church.

"Pity on you, Dornoch!" repeated St. Gilbert, as he went forth to meet the monster, armed with his bow and the sharpest of his arrows.

With the first arrow Gilbert pierced the hide of the monster, as he sought to breathe fire upon Dornoch. Now, the towns-folk buried it under a large stone situated on the moor between Dornoch and Skibo, and known traditionally as the Beast's Stone. And, until a few years ago, it was quite usual for the folks of this neighbourhood to compute local directions and distances in relation to their being in such and such a direction and so many yards or miles from the Beast's Stone.

Colann the Headless.

The track of moorland about Morar known in olden times as the Smooth Mile, just where Morar railway-station now stands, used to be haunted by a spectre called by the natives Colann the Headless. This evil thing was wont to ensnare and destroy the inhabitants at odd times as they passed along the Smooth Mile after dark. Efforts to rid the countryside of this menace involved the mysterious disappearance or death of all who made them. It was recognised that the strength of creatures such as Colann the Headless waned with the coming of daylight. And therefore Iain Garbh, one of the most doughty of the celebrated Chiefs of the MacLeods of Raasay, determined that he would try to overcome the spectre about the hour of dawn, since he was accustomed to pass this way when journeying between his island home and the south. However, long before dawn Iain Garbh and the headless one came to grips. With the coming of dawn its strength and prowess began to wane.

"Let me go!" entreated Colann, as the morning sun began to show above the hills of Morar.

"Not until thou swearest by the Book and the Seven Candles to quit this land forever," rejoined MacLeod of Raasay.

Accordingly, Colann the Headless swore on oath; and he was released. Ever since that dawn on the Smooth Mile,

Colann has confined himself to Beinn Eadarra, in the north of Skye; and to this very day the natives of Trotternish sing the song that he sang as he flew from the grips of Iain Garbh.

The Sea-Serpent.

According to Highland and Island folk-lore, the largest creature in the world was the sea-serpent. This creature was known sometimes as the Great Whirlpool of the Ocean; and its internal capacity was defined in the old rhyme which said that it could contain in its belly no fewer than seven whales.

Mr Iain, a former minister of the Parish of Glen Elg, who died in 1875, was fond of sailing, and often put out to sea in his yacht. One day, while sailing with his two daughters and another clergyman, and a boy named Donald MacCrimmon, who assisted him with the sails, a huge monster rose quite close to the side of the yacht, putting such a wave aboard her that she was nearly swamped. The monster, my informant in Glen Elg assured me, "was as big and as round as a herring barrel, and of great length. And it went wriggling up and down through the water, zigzag, right and left like."

Greatly frightened, the occupants of the yacht kept on their course down toward the Sandaig Isles, at the mouth of Loch Hourn. Meanwhile the monster, which they now realised was a sea-serpent, continued to disport itself dangerously close to the yacht. Once they had steered into Loch Hourn, they saw it no more that day. They tarried some time at Arnisdale. When, on the morrow, they were about to return, one of Mr Iain's daughters insisted on being allowed to go home to the Manse of Glen Elg, on foot, a distance of thirteen miles, accompanied by a little terrier she had with her. The others returned by yacht; and again they encountered the sea-serpent at the mouth of Loch Hourn. "In fact," concluded my story-teller, "they truly thought it had been waiting for them there. Och, I don't think it, though. Anyway, they got past it, and safely home after an exciting adventure!"

This, no doubt, was the sea-serpent seen by an Islesman at Kylerhea some years ago. "Yess, yess," averred the Islesman in question, "one day I saw the fearful head of the beast go down the Kyle; and, indeed, it wass a week before his tail passed!"

By the roadside up near Scallasaig there is a serpent-mound, where the people in olden times used to worship the serpent.

"How long ago would that be, John?" I asked the late John MacRae, aforementioned, a year or two before his death.

"Och, about two thousand years ago, I am sure," responded John, now prepared to dilate considerably on the matter of serpents and serpent-mounds. And then I sat silently with my note-book and pencil, and wrote down the following statement, word for word, from the lips of John MacRae: "The mound was in the shape of a serpent; and when the chief of the people would die, he would be buried in the head of the serpent. One from London, that was going about searching things like that, opened the mound, and they found in the mound a big stone coffin with a big stone slab on the top. And there the bowl was found with the ashes of the chief of the people at that time. The bowl was taken to the Manse. That's about fifty years ago. It was there for a few months; and they took it to Edinburgh, to some museum or something. They were saying that there was a funny noise in the Manse when the bowl was lying there. If there was any treasure in the bowl, or in the grave along with the bowl, it was taken out before. You see, had he any treasure—the chief like—guns and money and the like—I'm sure they wouldn't be putting much money in the grave. It would be going into the grave with the dead man, so, when he would rise in the next world, he would be ready to start at the same game as he was carrying on here on earth."

A very bewildering statement, I grant you!

At Cosaig there is another serpent-mound. Some years ago the suggestion was made by a number of archæologists that it also should be opened. Indeed, all the arrangements for the excavation of the site had been completed. But a

violent thunderstorm broke the night before; and the people of Glen Elg was convinced that this storm was an expression of God's wrath at the proposed opening of the serpent-mound, which the natives regarded as an act of desecration. So great was the local pressure brought to bear on the archæologists that finally the project was abandoned.

CHAPTER VII

THE SPIRIT-MULTITUDE

IT is none other than the Grey West Wind that brings in his train the *Sluagh* or Spirit-Multitude, by which the Western Highlands and Hebrides are visited from time to time. In a nebular state, the armies of the Spirit-Host, as it sometimes is called, hover above the places where, when in human form, the individuals composing it transgressed. These armies of the *Sluagh* manœuvre in mid-air, where in seeming bewilderment and pother they fly hither and thither, until at length they come into conflict.

Few have seen the Spirit-Host that is wont to follow in the wake of the Grey West Wind; but on nights of calm and frost many have heard the shouting as the legions wage war against another upon the battle-grounds of space. The rustling of the armour of these armies, it is said, is as the sound of a breeze disturbing withered reeds.

The old folks of Barra and of North and South Uist will assure you that, when there is a deep darkness on the night and a burden of anger on the tide, the *Sluagh* will be seeking shelter in the shadowing stalks of the little red rye-grass, and behind the stems of the ragwort. So, you may imagine how nimble are the members of the Spirit-Host, and how easily they might invade a dwelling-place without being observed, even though every precaution be taken against their entry.

Blood of the Hosts.

Alexander Carmichael records in his notes to *Carmina Gadelica* that, while collecting runes and invocations in the more southerly of the Outer Hebrides, he heard many strange tales associated with the Spirit-Multitude. He was told by a native of Barra that, after an aerial battle between the rival forces of the *Sluagh,* the rocks and boulders are

stained as with crimson blood. The red crotal obtained from lichened rocks, following upon a spell of hard frost, is called *Fuil nan Sluagh,* Blood of the Hosts. And it is said that, when the Nimble Men (Aurora Borealis) are giving battle in the air, the blood of their victims falls to the ground; and this 'elf's blood' congeals and forms the stones referred to in the Western Isles as blood-stones.

Although to-day belief in the *Sluagh* is on the wane, Carmichael noted that, since it is from the west that the Spirit-Multitude is believed to come, it was customary to close the doors and windows on the west side of a house in which an islander lay dying, lest any strange contingent entered, and brought ill-fortune to its departing inmate. In some parts of the mainland, where the tradition of the *Sluagh* is totally unknown, it was the practice to open as widely as possible the door and windows of a dwelling in which a person was on the point of death, so that at the moment of expiry the escape of his disembodied spirit might be facilitated.

The persistence with which belief in the Spirit-Multitude prevailed in Argyll is demonstrated by the fact that, when a burial was taking place at Glen Creran, in Appin, as recently as last century, immediately the corpse had been lowered and the earth closed over it, the funeral party used to smash the bier against a certain tree in the burying-ground, so as to render it useless in the event of the *Sluagh's* endeavouring to lure the dead away with it.

To those unacquainted with the intricacies of the Gaelic language, it may be of passing interest to mention that the word, slogan, is derived from the Gaelic words, *sluagh,* denoting a host or multitude, and *gairm,* a cry or calling. Hence the true meaning of slogan—the cry of the host, the battle-cry.

The Spirit-Multitude in Benbecula.

One still hears in Benbecula queer tales of the manner in which human beings have been carried off—'spirited away' —by the Spirit-Host. Carmichael, aforementioned, was told of a native of that Island who had been borne aloft so

often that he would not venture across the threshold after dark.

The islet of Hestamul, situated not far from Creagorry, in Benbecula, and close to the South Ford, is identified as the place whereon, according to lore current in the Outer Hebrides, the *Sluagh* deposited the fair daughter of a French king, after she had been 'spirited' over leagueless wastes of air, and had endured untold hardship at its hands. As a result of the harsh treatment this princess received, she died on Hestamul; and she was interred there in presence of a great convention of the Islesfolk—so the story goes.

Wraith of a Spanish Princess.

The previous folk-tale recalls a similar one associated with Keil, the old-world burial-ground of Morven, overlooking the Sound of Mull and the lofty mountains of that Island. In the days when it was customary for the spirit of the last person interred to take upon itself the duty known as grave-watching, until the next interment should occur, two men living in Morven entered into a pact that whichever of them survived would keep watch in the burial-ground at Keil. One night the survivor, during his vigil, witnessed the wraiths of the departed rise from their lairs. Among them was the wraith of his friend, and one that seemed to lag a little behind the others when they were mustering for their aerial excursion. On addressing the latter, he learnt that it was the wraith of a Spanish princess about to visit her native haunts on earth.

Now, there is a tradition in Morven that there was buried at Keil the body of a Spanish princess believed to have been killed aboard the galleon, *Florida*, when in 1588 that unit of the Spanish Armada was blown up by the MacLeans in Tobermory Bay, only a few miles distant across the Sound of Mull.

"The War is against Clan Ranald."

In Skye and in South Uist there is current a folk-tale relating to the strange manner in which a settlement was reached in a dispute that had arisen between Clan Ranald

and MacLeod of MacLeod, long after the death of the chiefs during whose lifetime the dispute had originated. A certain short and swarthy native of Skye, while flaying a sheep within his own house at Fearann na Leatha, was prevailed upon by an invisible agency to go to the door, whence he was instantly carried off his feet, and borne away in mid-air to the old churchyard at Eynort. There his arrival was awaited by a great assemblage of disembodied spirits that appointed him as their leader. From Eynort this Spirit-Multitude took to the air, and visited various other parts of Skye, having had its numbers considerably augmented by spectral contingents wheresoever it chanced to land.

This Spirit-Host ultimately sped across the Minch from Vaternish to South Uist, where it discovered a similar spirit "rising," mustered from all the burying-places in the extensive provinces then belonging to the MacDonalds of Clan Ranald, and commanded by a man ruddy in complexion and tall in stature. Preliminary negotiations between the captains of the rival Spirit-Hosts resulted in an agreement to the effect that the captains themselves would wrestle out the dispute, and that their wraith contingents would act as umpires, and see to it that no unfair nor foul means were adopted by either of the contestants. Scarcely had the contest begun when the short and swarthy leader of the MacLeod Spirit-Host was almost overwhelmed by the tall, ruddy captain commanding Clan Ranald's aerial forces. And it was not until then the former recollected that in the hose of his stocking was the *sgian-dubh,* or black knife, with which he had been flaying the sheep at Fearann na Leatha, when an impulse took him to the door of his house. When he thought that the Spirit-Host of Clan Ranald was not watching attentively, he drew his *sgian-dubh,* and thrust it into the breast of his Clan Ranald adversary, who instantly dropped dead at his feet.

Then there arose from the spectral armies of the MacLeods a tremendous shout; and thrice they called out: "*An cogadh an aghaidh Chlann Raonuill!* The war is against Clan Ranald!"

The abrupt end to the struggle in MacLeod's favour was

a signal to the Spirit-Multitude that its adjudication was at an end. And, so, its members returned to the lairs they had left in their respective territories. Soon the MacLeod protagonist found himself once again on the threshold of his own home at Fearann na Leatha. But where was the black knife, with which he had been flaying the sheep? He could not find it anywhere!

It was not until some days after the gathering of the Spirit-Hosts that a number of men, while collecting the cattle pastured on the vast machar-lands fringing the seaboard of South Uist, came upon the lifeless body of one of their kinsmen, who had a *sgian-dubh* fast in his breast.

Black Donald of the Faery Throng.

While ploughing a strip of land on the farm of Baile-pheutrais, on the Isle of Tiree, a man, who later became known as Black Donald of the Faery Throng, was caught in a heavy shower that came upon him out of the west. Not a sight could be seen of Donald when the shower had passed. There, in the field, were the horse and plough, sure enough; but no Donald. Late the same evening, however, he returned to the township from an easterly direction, carrying his jacket over his arm. He then related the story of his disappearance—of how the Little Folk of the Isles had borne him away invisibly in an eddy of wind to the islands lying to the north—to Coll, and then on to Skye. Donald, by way of proving his account of this adventure, informed the Tiree folks that a person, whom he proceeded to name, had died on the adjacent Island of Coll, and that in the morning a number of the inhabitants of that Isle, in preparation for the funeral, would be coming across the Gunna Sound to procure whisky at a township of Tiree noted in olden times for its secret stills. Scarcely had Donald uttered these words when a group of men from Coll was seen to approach the said township with an empty cask. In passing behind Baile-pheutrais, the men told the natives of the death of a friend in Coll, and also of the object of their visit to Tiree that day.

Donald assured his kinsfolk, moreover, that he had

enjoyed his transportation to the isles lying to the northward; and he confessed that he regretted nothing of his experience except that, at the bidding of the faery throng, he had dropped from the eddy an arrow that killed on the Isle of Skye a speckled cow.

And from that day until his death the folks of Tiree knew Donald by no other name than Black Donald of the Faery Throng.

The Invisible Host.

When the faeries leave home in numbers, they travel through the air in eddies of wind. In calm, summer weather, when there is not a breath of breeze, a momentary rustling of grass-blade or leaf may be observed, or a whirl of dust. These are evidences, it is held, that batches of faeries are travelling by.

In the Gaelic such an eddy is called the Little People's Puff of Wind. If it be suspected that, while travelling in this wise, the faeries are taking away with them men, women, children, or even animals and necessary household utensils, they are compelled to drop whatsoever they may be carrying, should the person suspecting them of such be quick enough to throw his left shoe into such an eddy, or pitch his bonnet toward it, remarking while so doing "*Is leat-sa so: is leam-sa sin!*—This is yours: that is mine!"

In the Hebrides to this day instances are recorded in which ordinary mortals, when going home in the dark, have been caught up in the Little People's Puff of Wind, and transported far from their destination. When eventually such victims have been allowed to return to earth, it has taken them some time to recover their senses sufficiently to enable them to recognise their own kith and kin and their homes. And, even in broad daylight, earth-bound dwellers, swept off their feet by faery eddies, have been borne across deep water from one island to another, and they fearing all the time lest they should drop into the sea.

Carried Away in an Eddy of Wind.

On the Island of Islay there lived a young woman, who was about to be given in marriage to a wealthy neighbour.

But she had a lover who assured a friend that, if he could afford an extravagant wedding-feast, he would carry off the bride himself. Thereupon the friend promised him his entire store of whisky, thirty-five gallons in all. On the strength of his friend's munificence, the young man abducted the bride, and proceeded with the marriage-feast, which lasted for a month. A day or two afterwards, when he and his wife were passing through the machar on their way to visit some relatives, they observed the approach of an eddy of wind. As it reached them, the young man was taken ill. His death ensued soon after. "If the dead have life," his wife said to him on his death-bed, "I pray that you shall never be a night away from your own bed." To the wife's consternation, he returned to her the night after his burial, and assured her that he was well in mind and body. He asked her not to be alarmed, since he had been carried away in an eddy of wind by the Lady of the Emerald Isle, and would be able to return permanently to her if she flung a dirk or other sharp instrument at the next eddy she saw or heard.

For days the bereaved and mystified widow watched anxiously for an approaching eddy of wind. At last one came her way. At it she threw a knife; and, lo! thereupon her husband dropped out of space at her feet. He then told her that in the grave, in which he was supposed to lie, nothing would be found but an oak log.

The young woman now summoned the villagers and her relatives to share in her rejoicing. But they were of opinion that sorrow had bereft her of her senses. So as to prove her delusion, they all agreed to exhume the body. This they proceeded to do; but to their dire consternation they found the coffin to contain nothing but a log of oak. Not until then were they prepared to accept the husband as genuine, and believe his account of how the Lady of the Emerald Isle had spirited him away in an eddy of wind!

CHAPTER VIII

THE SEAL-FOLK.

SO far as their legends and traditions of the Seal-folk are concerned, Ireland, the Outer Hebrides, Argyll and her Islands, the Orkney and Shetland Isles, Caithness and Sutherland, and the north-east coast of Scotland—and even Norway and Greenland, for that matter—share a folklore very similar to one another. Although to-day the Children of the Seals are barely remembered in the Hebrides except by the older inhabitants, traditions and folk-tales of this elusive race are still current in western Ireland, and also in the Northern Isles.

Authentic data about the Seal-folk are rare; and the writings of few folklorists contain any record of them. The following traditions are perhaps the best of those I have collected over a number of years.

The Seal-folk in Ireland.

Until quite recent times, the inhabitants of Donegal and of the many islands lying off the west coast of Ireland believed the seal to be of human origin, and capable of casting its skin and assuming human form. The natives of Achill Island, for example, still speak of their seal ancestry; and the old folks of Achill strongly resent the killing of seals along the neighbouring coasts.

Authorities on Irish folk-lore tell us that the families of Coneely, O'Sullivan, O'Flaherty, and Mac-na-mara are directly descended from the Seal-folk. To this day it is quite a common occurrence to meet in western Ireland Gaels who not only accept the tradition of the Seal-folk, but even

declare that they have seen seals in the process of metamorphosis, have spoken with them at such times, and have listened to their singing. There is a tradition in the west of Ireland that in ancient times members of the Coneely family, who are regarded as being one of the earliest septs to settle in the country, were changed into seal-men and seal-women by "art magick." Thus it is that no Coneely can slay a seal without incurring ill-fortune and the censure of his kindred. Some years ago a writer in the *Folklore Journal* mentioned that, since seals are sometimes known as Coneelys, many of this sept altered their surname to Conolly. The seal ancestry of the O'Flahertys is described at length in Hardiman's notes to O'Flaherty's *Description of H-iar Connaught.*

A Donegal Tradition.

The natives of Aranmore were so deeply impressed with the Seal-folk tradition that within living memory nothing would induce them to molest a seal in any way. A folk-lorist, writing to a Belfast journal some years ago, gave the following interesting account of the Seal-folk tradition as current in Donegal about the year, 1875: "Until lately the islanders of Aranmore could not be induced to attack a seal, they being strongly under the impression that these animals were human beings metamorphosed by the power of their own witchcraft. In confirmation of this notion, they used to repeat the story of one Rodgers of their island, who, being alone in his skiff fishing, was overtaken by a storm and driven on the shore of the Scottish Highlands. Having landed, he approached a house which was close to the beach, and on entering it was accosted by name. Expressing his surprise at finding himself known in a strange country, and by one whom he had never seen, the old man who addressed him bared his head, and, pointing to a scar on his skull, reminded Rodgers of an encounter he had had with a seal in one of the caves of Aranmore. 'I was,' he said, 'that seal, and this is the mark of the wound you inflicted on me. I do not blame you, however, for you were not aware of what you were doing.'"

The MacPhees of Colonsay.

Belief that drowned persons sometimes assumed the form of seal-men and seal-women, and that they were able periodically to lay aside their seal-skins and assume human proportions during the night-time and return to the sea as seals at sunrise, was prevalent in Ireland, in the Western Highlands, in the Outer Hebrides, in the Orkneys and Shetlands, and in Scandinavia.

Tradition has it that the MacPhees of Colonsay, an island of the Inner Hebrides, are of the stock of a seal-woman, whose seal-skin was discovered on a rock one day, and carried off to a house near at hand by an unthinking islander. However, the owner did not rest until she recovered her seal-skin, whereupon she returned to her life in the sea.

One of the MacPhees—so it is believed in Argyll and in the Hebrides—was retained in captivity in a cavern by the shore of Colonsay by a seal-woman, who ministered to all his requirements, except to the need he always expressed for his freedom. Came a day when MacPhee, taking advantage of the seal-woman's temporary absence, effected his escape. But, on her returning to find that he had gone, the seal-woman instantly gave pursuit. MacPhee fled to the protection of his home, where he kept a dog, black of hue, and fierce—so fierce, in truth, that the Colonsay folks dreaded it, and often tried to persuade MacPhee to dispose of it. But MacPhee consistently gave them the same reply. "The Black Dog's day is yet to come!" he always urged, this being a Gaelic equivalent of the saying, "Every dog has its day!"

Now, the seal-woman overtook the fleeing MacPhee by the shore; and she would have captured him, had not the black dog engaged her. And the old folks of Colonsay, reciting island folk-lore at their ceilidhs round the peat-fires on winter nights, narrate that the contest between dog and seal-woman continued until the black dog killed the seal-woman, and the seal-woman killed the black dog!

Clan MacCodrum of the Seals.

In the Hebrides it is believed that the seals were royal attendants in the Palaces of Lochlann (Norway), in the Land of the King of Sleep, whence they came to the shores of Western and Northern Scotland and of Ireland in the capacity of secret emissaries in the service of the Kings of Lochlann.

The North Uist sept known as the Clan MacCodrum of the Seals, a sept of the historic Clan Ranald of the Isles, has been named traditionally, and for centruies, the Children of the Seals. The tradition of the Seal-folk as it existed in the Hebrides is alluded to by Sheriff Nicolson among his collection of Gaelic proverbs, where he makes mention of the *Clann Mhic-Codruim nan Ròn,* the Children of MacCodrum of the Seals. Nicolson recites the Seal-folk legend concerning the MacCodrums' having been metamorphosed into seals. But, though they altered their form, they still retained their human souls. In the Outer Hebrides generally, and in North Uist particularly, popular belief has it that the MacCodrums were seals by day, and human beings by night. And, since the MacCodrums were conscious of their seal affinity, nothing would induce them to kill or to molest or injure a seal in any way.

Whereas the natives of Western Ireland refrained from interfering with seals because they looked upon them as transformed human beings, the MacCodrums of the Hebrides showed them the greatest deference, not merely because they believed them to be of human origin, but because they believed them to be of their very own flesh and blood—their very kith and kin.

Seal-folk tradition in the Western Highlands and Islands asserts that the Clan MacCodrum of the Seals derived its title from a progenitor who, when wandering by the shore of his Hebridean isle, came upon a company of seals when they were in the act of discarding their seal-coats before bathing themselves. Home with one of the coats dashed MacCodrum; and he was on the point of concealing his find above the lintel of his door when its seal-woman owner followed him in. This seal-woman MacCodrum restrained

from returning to the sea. He clothed her with garments similar to those worn by ordinary human beings on his native Island of North Uist. Later he married her; and by her he had a large family. This *clann* or family became known throughout the Western Isles and even in Ireland as the Children of MacCodrum of the Seals. But one day, when MacCodrum was away from home, his seal-woman wife searched the house for her seal-skin. On finding it, she donned it once more, and immediately returned to her sea-kindred.

Fiona MacLeod and the Seal-man.

Fiona MacLeod (William Sharp) made the tradition of the MacCodrums the theme of his tale, *Dàn-nan-Ròn,* Song of the Seals, of which the principal character is one Manus MacCodrum. Albeit the tale concludes in a somewhat fantastic manner, it opens by portraying faithfully the tradition of the Seal-folk as handed down from father to son for many generations in the Outer Hebrides. With the plunging of Manus MacCodrum into the sea, hailing the seals as his blood kindred, Fiona MacLeod's story finishes on a dramatic note. Manus "was a fine lad to see," he wrote; "but, though most of the fisherfolk of the Lewis and North Uist are fair, either with reddish hair and grey eyes, or blue-eyed and yellow-haired, he was of a brown skin with dark hair and dusky brown eyes. He was, however, as unlike to the dark Celts of Arran and the Inner Hebrides as to the Northmen. He came of his people sure enough. All the MacCodrums of North Uist had been brown-skinned and brown-haired and brown-eyed; and herein may have lain the reason why, in bygone days, this small clan of Uist was known throughout the Western Isles as the *Sliochd nan Ròn,* the offspring of the Seals."

In Fiona MacLeod's story the Isle of Berneray, in the Sound of Harris, is described as one of the homes of the Race of the Seals. Those of you who have read the *Dàn nan Ròn,* the Song of the Seals, will recollect how Manus MacCondrum, himself one of the Seal-folk, would be knowing when the tide was ebbing across the great Reef

of Berneray—how he crossed the room on tiptoe, and soundlessly opened the door, and the salt wind blowing fresh against his cheeks, and the smell of wet seaweed and pungent bog-myrtle coming sweet to the nostrils—how he would hear the call of the skua on the rocky promontory, and the wailing of the moon-restless plover on the hill behind—how, after the earthing of his love, and the tide had ebbed in his heart, he would be crossing the Sound of Berneray continually, and making for the old Pictish tower known at Dun Sticir, in the shadow of Beinn Bhreac—how the island folks would be seeing him at low tide upon the Reef of Berneray, singing wild and strange runes.

When Marcus learned that Manus had the heart of his cousin, Anne, he was sorely troubled—

"They say that the seals are men under magic spell. Have you ever pondered that thing, Anne, my cousin?" inquired Marcus.

"I am knowing well what you mean."

"Then you will know that the MacCodrums of North Uist are called the *Sliochd nan Ròn*?"

"I have heard."

"And would you be for marrying a man that is of the race of the beasts, and himself knowing what *geasa* means, and who may any day go back to his people?"

"Ah, now, Marcus, sure it is making a mock of me you are. Neither you nor any here believes that foolish thing. How can a man born of a woman be a seal, even though his *sinnsear* (forbears) were the offspring of the sea-people?"

The same writer again uses the Seal-folk legend in the *Rune of Manus MacCodrum*—

"It is I, Manus MacCodrum,
I am telling you that, you, Anndra of my blood,
And you, Neil, my grandfather, and you, and you,
and you!
Ay, ay, Manus my name is, Manus MacManus!
It is I myself, and no other,
Your brother, O Seals of the Sea!"

"A Voice of Supernatural Beauty."

In 1894 the Rev. Archibald MacDonald collected the poems and songs of John MacCodrum, the North Uist Bard. MacCodrum, who was a contemporary of Prince Charlie (1710-96), is regarded as having been the last bard to the Lords of the Isles, an office to which he succeeded about 1763. It may be remembered that he was among those who insisted on the authenticity of MacPherson's *Ossian*. MacCodrum was buried at Hougary, in North Uist.

The Rev. Archibald MacDonald, aforementioned, was of opinion that the unique deference shown to seals was due to their large, soft eyes, and to the appeal of their semi-human expression. "Hence on one occasion," wrote MacDonald, "a hunter aiming at a seal with his gun or bow heard the creature begin to sing, in a voice of supernatural beauty, a song lamenting the loss of her dear ones."

It was MacDonald who also wrote of a woman named MacCodrum, who was probably of the Bard's lineage, that she "used to be seized with violent pains at the time of the annual seal hunt, out of sympathy, it was supposed, with her suffering relatives."

In Ireland, as in the Western Isles, there are many who claim to having heard seals singing. The late Mrs Kennedy-Fraser, who in collaboration with Kenneth MacLeod, "the greatest faery of modern times," produced *The Songs of the Hebrides,* actually recorded the singing of the seals. And a friend of mine named Alexander MacFarquhar, who is the miller at Dell, near the Butt of Lewis, frequently has given me a sensational account of how, when nearing the lonely outpost known as North Rona, the seals always greet his arrival with seal-music. North Rona, which lies out in the Atlantic, some forty miles from the Butt of Lewis, is now uninhabited. Upon it, however, MacFarquhar pastures a number of sheep, necessitating his visiting the island at least once a year, when weather permits. I have often heard him imitating the singing of the seals, when they are behaving "like a great Gaelic congregation singing psalms."

IOGAN AND HIS HOST.

Not unlike the story of how Rodgers, the Aranmore islander, was addressed by a man who, when in the metamorphosed shape of a seal, had been wounded by him in a tussle, is the following Seal-folk tale associated with North Uist. The incident is related at length in *Carmina Gadelica*. Some Uist fishermen, while engaged with hand-lines off the rocky shores of Cousamul, in the Outer Hebrides, were overtaken by a storm that drove the craft into a fiord—well, some say in Tiree, others say in Lewis. At all events, hospitable entertainment was provided for the fishermen in a croft near the shore of the fiord. In strict conformity with custom, the host was never given—nor, indeed, did he ask—the names of such guests as happened to be unkown to him, until they were on the point of taking their departure.

On this occasion the host was "a big grizzly-bearded man, whose face, hands, and feet were full of scars and mended bones." When eventually he learnt whence his guests had come, and that their spokesman was called Iogan, he drew their attention to his scars and mended bones, and in the following terms addressed himself to Iogan:

"Iogan! Iogan! Iogan!
Iogan who came hither
On the crest of the nine fifty waves,
Thou man who did'st break the teeth of my head,
Roused am I to see thee with me,
Iogan! Iogan! Iogan!
Though I gave thee food,
Butter and cheese and flesh,
By thy two hands, Iogan,
'Twas thou drove the dart through my paw."

The grizzly-beared host was none other than the seal-man, who had been on a visit to his oceanic kinsfolk off the Isle of Cousamul when Iogan and his men raided them, and slew many of them without mercy. Iogan, now petrified with fear and filled with remorse, vowed that never again would he or any member of his crew regard a seal with anything but deference and the deepest affection.

THE SEAL-FOLK TRADITION IN SHETLAND.

In 1852 Lieut. Thomas, R.N., the indefatigable folklorist, contributed to the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries* a ballad he obtained in Shetland from the dictation of a venerable 'lady-udaller' or proprietrix, who resided at Suarra Voe, one of the most remote districts of the Northern Isles. According to Thomas, the ballad "is founded on the superstition of the Seals or Selkies being able to throw off their waterproof jackets and assume the more graceful proportions of the genus Homo." The term, Silky, he informs us further, is commonly used in these parts for a seal—a word that appears as though it might be a corruption of the Norse, *selch*, a seal. The rocky islet of Sule Skerry, situated some twenty-five miles to the westward of Hoy Head, in Orkney, is still the resort of thousands of seals; and the ballad referred to is *The Great Silkie of Sule Skerrie,* the third verse of which runs thus:

"I am a man upo' the lan'
An' I am a Silkie in the sea;
An' when I'm far and far frae lan',
My dwelling is in Sule Skerrie."

Frequent references are to be found in authoritative books on the Orkneys and Shetlands of the manner in which the Silkies could change themselves into human beings.

Among the many folk-tales current in the Shetland Isles about the Seal-folk is one that tells of a fisherman who, when on his way to the fishing early one morning, passed close to a rock on which a large bull seal lay asleep in the sun. In stealth he approached it, and plunged his knife deep into its flesh. The wounded animal immediately flopped its way from the rock, and slithered into the sea, taking with him the Shetlander's knife.

Some years later, this Shetlander, in company with others from the Northern Isles, paid a visit to Norway (Lochlann), in order to purchase timber for building purposes on the treeless Shetlands. Stuck in a beam supporting the roof of the first house he entered was the very knife with which he had essayed to kill the seal. Fear

now took hold of him. He firmly believed his last moment had arrived. But the master of this Norwegian household simply took the knife down from the beam and, in returning it to its original owner, warned him of the consequences he might expect if ever again he sought to slay an innocent seal sunning himself on the rocks.

The Trows of Orkney.

There is a tradition in the Northern Isles that even the trows (the faery-folk of the Orkneys and Shetlands) sometimes changed themselves into seals—particularly the land-trows, who were more often in need of such metamorphosis than were the sea-trows. Land-trows, it is said, were obliged to take the form of seals when, in search of a human wife, they had to cross from one island to another. There is an Orcadian belief that trows are prone to foist themselves on bachelors who may be giving a thought occasionally to matrimony; and Orcadian mothers, when cross with their children, frequently use the phrase, " Trow tak' thee ! "

When a lady sea-trow decided to go ashore on one of the Northern Isles in search of a human husband, she instantly discarded her seal-skin. If in later years she happened to come upon her seal-skin, she was tempted to get into it again, and return to the sea, even at the cost of abandoning her husband and children for ever. The Seal-folk traditions of the Orkneys and Shetlands are replete with instances in which seal-women have deserted their families.

There is a story told by Alexander Polson in *Our Highland Folklore Heritage* of an old Shetlander who, when shipwrecked on an Island some considerable distance from his own, entered a house, the interior economy of which seemed strangely familiar to him. Imagine his consternation, then, when he recognised in the goodwife his very own sister who, some twenty years earlier, had disappeared mysteriously from her home. His realising that he had come to the house of a trow made him anxious to depart, lest anything untoward should occur. But his sister pressed him to tarry awhile, and have something to eat. No sooner was he seated at a meal than a large seal entered the room, passed

quietly in front of him on his way to an inner apartment, and returned a moment or two later in the guise of a pleasant, well-favoured man, who made the shipwrecked islander doubly welcome on his sister's account.

The distinction of being regarded as the Children of the King of Lochlann, *fo geasaibh*—under enchantment—was also shared by the swans. Traditions not dissimilar to those connected with seals that have discarded their seal-skins and assumed human shape, are told to this day in the Orkneys and Shetlands, and also in the Western Isles, of swans that by lonely mountain tarns have been known to abandon their feathery coverings when taking on the human form.

In the folk-lore of Caithness, seals are said to be fallen angels, and therefore as kindred with the Merry Dancers, or Northern Lights—the Aurora Borealis. And the Celtic concept of their being the Children of the King of Lochlann, under spell, has its parallel in Caithness and in the Northern Isles, where they are thought to be Finns, who have voyaged across the North Sea from Norway in the form of seals.

Mermaid Traditions.

The manner in which the seal-women of the Western Isles and of Ireland and the lady-trows of the Northern Isles immediately returned to the sea, on recovering their hidden skins, recalls similar traditions of the *maighdean-mara* or mermaid, a creature of the sea, half-woman and half-fish, with long, dishevelled hair which she sometimes might be seen combing at dawn or dusk, while seated on a rock offshore. Mermaids have been known to put off the fish-like covering of their lower limbs; and, if the finder of such covering can keep it hidden, the owner is unable to return to her life in the sea. Both in Ireland and in the Scottish Highlands and Islands, folk-tales are told of how ordinary men have detained mermaids by hiding their covering, have married them, and have had large families by them. Eventually some member of the family, discovering the mother's covering, brings it to her in surprise, thus enabling her to desert her human home for the sea. Such mermaids are said to spend much of their time in pursuing vessels, just

as do the Blue Men of the Minch, described in the following chapter. Celtic tradition has it that, in order to rid themselves of her company, mariners have been known to cast overboard a number of empty barrels. While the mermaid continued to be distracted by examining these barrels, the vessel was sailing beyond her reach.

Upon a time, a native of a Harris township, that goes by the Gaelic name signifying Unripe Island, captured a mermaid, and retained her in close confinement for a year. How ultimately the mermaid effected her escape is not recorded. And a Skye-man, likewise, caught a mermaid, whom he released only when she had granted him his three wishes—that he should have the faculty of foretelling the future, that he should be able to cure scrofula or the king's evil, and that he should acquire the art of music.

According to Peter Buchan, author of the *Annals of Peterhead,* belief in the mermaid was widespread among the seafarers of the north-east coast of Scotland. Many of the fisher-folks held the opinion that the caves penetrating the more inaccessible parts of the coast were tenanted by mermaids. "Some old men," writes Buchan, "remember a mermaid pitching upon the bowsprit of a small vessel belonging to Peterhead, which was driven among the rocks near Slains Castle, and all hands perished save one man who bore the tidings to land."

During the first few decades of the nineteenth century a mermaid could be seen constantly by the shores of the Cromarty Firth. Tradition in Cromarty still tells of how this mermaid was wont to sit on a certain stone in the moonlight, braiding her long, yellow tresses.

A Merman Sighted.

In the year, 1814, a merman was sighted off Port Gordon, in Banffshire. According to an account supplied by the schoolmaster of Rathven, two fishermen, whose testimony was above suspicion, were returning from the fishing "about three or four o'clock yesterday afternoon, when about a quarter of a mile from the shore, the sea being perfectly calm, they observed, at a small distance from their boat,

with its back towards them, and half its body above the water, a creature of a tawny colour, appearing like a man sitting, with his body half-bent. Surprised at this, they approached towards him, till they came within a few yards, when the noise made by the boat occasioned the creature to turn about, which gave the men a better opportunity of observing him. His countenance was swarthy, his hair short and curled, of a colour between a green and a grey: he had small eyes, a flat nose, his mouth was large, and his arms of an extraordinary length. Above the waist, he was shaped like a man, but as the water was clear, my informants could perceive that, from the waist downwards, his body tapered considerably or, as they expressed it, like a large fish without scales, but could not see the extremity." [1]

The creature did not give the observers much time to examine him closely, for, although he gazed at them intently for a moment or two, he suddenly dived out of sight. A little later he reappeared at some distance from the boat, accompanied by what the fishermen concluded to be a female of the same species.

Somewhat alarmed at the sight of this merman, the fishermen pulled for the shore with all haste. To the schoolmaster they gave this account without the slightest variation.

My late, dearly beloved friend, John Wilson Dougal, of Edinburgh, who, over a period of about thirty years, wandered through the Outer Hebrides with his geological hammer, completing his researches into the flinty-crush formations which he discovered, used to relate a mermaid story told him by a shepherd dwelling in a lonely glen in South Uist. According to the shepherd, two local fishermen, when drawing their net about twenty years ago, found that it had ensnared a baby mermaid. The mother mermaid pleaded with the fishermen to release her baby, promising that, if they did so, "none of them would be drowned evermore."

"It was strange," the shepherd used to remark, "that the mermaid could speak the Gaelic!"

[1] Letter dated 16th, August, of Geo. McKenzie, schoolmaster, Raffan, to the *Aberdeen Chronicle* of 20th, August, 1814.

A Mermaid's Burial on Benbecula.

In Barra and Benbecula and in North and South Uist are current several traditional tales about the mermaid, who sometimes is referred to in these parts as the *maighdean nan tonn,* the maiden of the waves. The story is told in Benbecula of how a number of Isleswomen, while cutting seaware at low tide on the Oitir Mhòr, were startled by a splashing sound that came from a still sea-pool near the end of the reef. On approaching the spot, they were surprised to find in the pool a miniature woman, whose long, dark hair floated like a great cluster of seaweed upon the face of the water. Closer investigation proved that in shape the lower part of her body resembled that of a salmon, but had no scales upon it. Convinced that at long last they were beholding the *maighdean-mara,* the women of Benbecula raised the alarm, so that their husbands and sons might hurry to the scene, and capture the creature if possible. In their endeavour to catch her, some of the men waded into the sea after her. But the mermaid was far too nimble for them; and, had it not been for the fact that a young lad had accidentally wounded her on the head with a stone, they never would have seen her again. The mermaid succumbed to her injuries; and, a week or so later, her body was found by the shore, not far from Nunton.

And it was none other than Duncan Shaw, Clan Ranald's factor at the time of this incident, who, on examining the body of the mermaid, perceived that she was a creature worthy of reverent burial. And, so, he directed a special coffin and a special winding-sheet to be prepared for the mermaid, whose remains at length were interred in the burial-ground at Nunton, and in the presence of a great assemblage of the Hebridean people.

A similar fate almost befell a mermaid on the Isle of Barra, when an old sailor, living at Kentangval, espied on a reef what he took to be an otter devouring a fish. It was not until he had picked up his glass that he discovered the creature on the reef was not an otter at all, but a mermaid holding a child.

Children of the Mermaid.

Once there lived among the sea-tangled caverns of north-western Scotland a people called the Children of the Mermaid. Tradition in the remote sea-clachans of Sutherland maintains that the Children of the Mermaid were the offspring of a fisherman by a mermaid who, having forfeited the fish-tail-shaped seal-skin covering the lower part of her body, made it possible for her admirer to capture her and take her to his home.

But there came a day when the Children of the Mermaid, while playing in the barn, chanced to discover among the rafters a seal-skin with a fish-like tail. This they instantly brought to their mother, who recognised it to be her long lost coat. Before their eyes she donned the seal-skin, and, without even bidding them good-bye, rushed away to the sea. Not since that day has the mermaid been seen by the shores of Sutherland, nor have the natives heard tell of her. But they declare that her descendants have derived from the sea richer and fuller harvests than have the ordinary inhabitants of these parts.

The Mermaid of Kessock.

Of similar nature is a story told in the locality of Inverness and the Black Isle about a mermaid known traditionally as the Mermaid of Kessock. One Paterson to name, when strolling along the shore by the Kessock Ferry, came upon a mermaid, whom he sought to detain. Paterson proceeded to remove some of the scales from her tail, in conformity with the old belief that, by so doing, a mermaid was compelled to assume human form. No sooner had he removed the scales than, lo! there stood before him a beautiful woman, whom he immediately married, and by whom he begat children. The mermaid's scales Paterson carefully wrapped up, and concealed in an outhouse.

The day came, however, when one of his children discovered the scales, and took them to his mother, who thereupon made for the shore, returned to her mermaid state, and was never seen again.

It is said, moreover, that Paterson's wife, long before she

recovered her scales, used to plead with him to allow her to return to her original element, promising him that, if he did so, his family would be blessed at all times with a plentiful supply of fish, and that no member of it would ever be drowned at the Kessock Ferry.

To this day there are folks dwelling at Kessock and elsewhere on the Black Isle, who firmly believe the story of the Mermaid of Kessock.

Seal-folk and Finn-folk.

Between the Seal-folk of the Hebrides and western Ireland and the mermen and mermaids of Caithness and the Northern Isles, there are several points of similarity. Both tribes, for example, are regarded as being of human descent. Furthermore, both are somewhat vaguely associated with the Finns, who are distinguished by the sleeky appearance of their clothing.

Scandinavian folklore is rich in allusions to a curious race inhabiting the archipelagoes, and known as the Finn-folk. These elusive creatures are akin, it is said, to the users of kayaks. They are described, like the Esquimos, as spending most of their lives in paddling through the narrow fiords in light canoes covered over with seal-skins.

During the seventeenth century, and probably at a date more recent, Orcadian waters were occasionally visited by Finns, who paddled in and about them in kayaks. This is borne out by at least three contemporary writers. The account of the Rev. George Brand, who in the year, 1700, was delegated by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to enquire into the religious state of the people of the Orkney and Shetland Isles, shows clearly that the solitary paddler in a seal-skin-covered skiff was no uncommon visitor to these Islands. In 1700 a Finn-man's canoe hung in the Church of Burray, in Orkney; but what happened to the canoe when that church was destroyed by fire is not known.

About a decade earlier (*circa* 1688) Dr. James Wallace, son of the minister of Kirkwall, "catched in Orkney" another specimen of a kayak, together with its occupant.

The kayak was despatched to Edinburgh. The minute book of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh shows that in September, 1696, "the shirt of the barbarous man that was in the boat," together with his canoe, paddle, and harpoon, had been bequeathed to Edinburgh University.

Two accounts are current as to the origin of the kayak to be seen in the Anthropological Museum of Marischal College, Aberdeen. A chronicler referring to it in the year, 1760, mentions that it was driven into the mouth of the River Don somewhere about 1728. In this kayak was a hairy man, speaking a language no one understood. "He lived but three days, though all possible care was taken to recover him."

In 1782 another account was published of this strange visitor to our shores. In this, reference is made to "a canoe taken from the Sea with an Indian man in it, about the beginning of this century." From this source we learn further that the occupant of the canoe "could give no account of himself." And, so, he was removed to Aberdeen, where he is recorded as having expired shortly after his arrival.

Kayakers in Greenland.

It was demonstrated by my late friend, David MacRitchie, the well-known anthropologist, that the occupant of an Esquimo kayak, when seen afar off, would appear to be sitting on the surface of the water, or half immersed in it. And this may explain, urged MacRitchie, how these nimble canoe-men frequently have been mistaken for marine animals of the seal order. It is easy to imagine how, in the process of time, the popular belief in the Seal-folk gained currency in western Ireland, in the Hebrides, and in the Northern Isles, when we remember that, as late as the early years of the eighteenth century, their sea-ways were visited by strange, little men who paddled about in kayaks, and at a distance resembled seals, and who, as is proved both by tradition and ethnology, became absorbed by the native population of the Isles of northern and western Scotland, and of western Ireland.

The impression made by the approach of Esquimos upon a party of Americans visiting the coast of Greenland is well illustrated by the following quotation, the source of which I cannot recollect at the moment:

"At one time, while in camp at Ikamiut, when the wind was blowing a gale, shutting us up all day in our tent, and tossing the waves of the fiord into such commotion that it would have been madness for any large boat to have ventured upon the water, we were thrilled by the cry that some kayakers were coming. They were three that belonged to the little settlement, and had come that day as a matter of course from Sukkertoppen, which was twenty miles distant. Upon reaching the shore and pulling themselves loose from their shells (canoes), the kayakers ran their hands into the apertures from which they had drawn their limbs, and brought out various objects of merchandise which they had purchased at the store for their families. Then they severally took up their kayaks and carried them to a secure place, and disappeared in the igloos (huts of earth and stone), where their families soon joined them to talk over the adventures of the week. To us they seemed like inhabitants of the sea, who were accustomed to shed their skins on coming out of the water."

But, for my own part, I like to think of the Seal-folk—and of the MacCodrums in particular—as vassals long, long ago in the royal Palaces of the Kings of Lochlann, and as having come to our Isles as secret emissaries from the Courts of the King of Sleep. They are, indeed, the Children of the Scandinavian King—under enchantment.

The Battle o' the Bay.

During the Great War, there served with a Highland Regiment overseas a certain man named Morrison, a native of Lewis, who in 1916 related the following strange story at a road outpost, 'Somewhere in France.'

There lived in the crofting township of Barvas, in that same Island of Lewis, an old family named MacCrimmon, one of the male members of which fell in love with, and married, a seal-woman. Exactly when this happened, no

Bays Loch, Isle of Berneray—haunt of the Seal-folk. The mountains in the distance are those of Harris

The Islands! Looking down toward Obbe and across the Sound of Harris from the slopes of Roneval. Ensay is the island in the middle-distance. Beyond lies Pabbay.

[*Facing P.* 112

Isle of Berneray and the Sound of Berneray as seen from the foreshore of North Uist at slack water—habitat of the Clan Andy of the Widgeons.

[*See P.* 126

High noon among the legend-haunted Isles. Isle of Killegray as seen from Isle of Ensay. Part of North Uist in the background.

[*Facing P.* 113

one in Barvas quite knew. All that the oldest inhabitants could say was that it happened long ago!

In any case, from the time of this strange union, fortune favoured the MacCrimmons increasingly. They seemed to become immune to danger, both on land and on sea. Nothing daunted them—least of all any untoward occurrence at sea, for the sea remained their natural element. They became great seamen, and dexterous fishermen. At stated times during his married life, MacCrimmon was wont to carry his seal-woman wife down to the sea at Barvas, that she might return for a brief spell to her own kindred, and enjoy the element of her nature. Being by birth a seal-woman rather than an ordinary human woman, she experienced some difficulty in moving about on land. Thus it came about that her earthly spouse was obliged to convey her to and from the seashore.

One morning, as MacCrimmon had just committed the seal-woman to the waves, he was seized by an old bull seal, who wrestled with him for dear life. Soon the tide was running red with the blood of the combatants. Though MacCrimmon carried a dirk, the nimbleness of his enraged adversary, who by this time had dragged him into the sea, gave him no opportunity of using it. A deep scar inflicted on his face by the tusk of the seal brought away the blood of him so quickly that no longer could he sustain the struggle. He would have drowned there and then, had not his seal-woman wife come to his succour. Taking from him the knife he held in his hand, she planted it so firmly in the belly of the bull seal that he had to release his death-grip of MacCrimmon, and sink down to death himself.

"O, that was the great fight," continued Morrison, "the fight of which the pipers only can tell, so that we, the people, understand them. They call it 'The Battle o' the Bays; and you should hear them of a winter's night in Barvas. Their piping calls the spirits from the sea, and one can still hear the singing of a dying seal in the drones of a Barvas pipe."

MacCrimmon staggered home as best he could, weakened by the loss of blood. That night his seal-woman wife comforted him to the utmost of her ability; and

she confessed to him how her love for him, long years before, had tempted her to desert her seal husband—aye, and how, in a moment of forgetfulness, she had endangered his life, since the seal-man always seeks out the seal-woman's earthly mate, when she desires to return to her own kith and kin among the Seal-folk. "No charm can I give you," she said, "save this, that the scar on thy face shall save thy children's children from the death of the sea, and they shall be marked thus to the end of thy race."

* * * * *

The sequel to this tale is stranger still. It may be read in full in William Kirk's *Stories of the Second-Sight in a Highland Regiment,* published by Eneas MacKay in 1933—a most fascinating volume. Briefly, the sequel is as follows. Soon after the recital of this tale in 1916 at an outpost in France, Morrison, the reciter, was wounded, and came home to this country, never to return to his original battalion. Thereafter one of the listeners, an officer in that battalion, lost sight of him completely. But this officer had not yet heard the last about the MacCrimmons. Some time later, when the battalion was receiving much-needed reinforcements, there arrived at the front a draft that included a MacCrimmon. The officer in question, recollecting Morrison's weird tale, succeeded in getting MacCrimmon allocated to his own company. Soon he recognised this addition to his ranks to be ill-adapted to soldiering. The sea appeared obviously to be his natural environment. There was no doubt that he was a MacCrimmon of Barvas—but, somehow or other, he did not have upon his face the traditional scar of his kindred, the Seal-folk. When the officer noted this deficiency, his interest both in MacCrimmon and in Morrison's tale subsided for a while.

* * * * *

Months later the battalion was billeted behind the lines, and near a spot where there was a private menagerie. From this menagerie there escaped a leopard that roamed at large in a neighbouring wood, greatly to the terror of the civilian population, and not altogether conducive to the

serenity of the troops. The battalion possessed several mascots in the form of dogs; and the owner of the leopard jaloused that his escaped exhibit probably would regard these mascots as worthy prey.

While MacCrimmon lay on his palliase, embracing the regimental fox-terrier, the leopard entered and seized the terrier. MacCrimmon, though badly shaken, emerged with no more than a facial gash that left a permanent scar. *This scar followed the traditional line of the family scar!*

The leopard's visitation now necessitated MacCrimmon's transference to hospital. When he rejoined his battalion in the line some time afterwards, the officer observed that a wonderful change had overtaken him. MacCrimmon's dourness and taciturnity had quitted him. When asked how he himself accounted for this change, he drew attention to the scar on his face, and remarked with satisfaction that now he had got the facial mark of his race.

* * * * *

A few nights later, poor MacCrimmon was killed. The officer, now on the point of writing home to his people in Barvas, sent for another Barvas man in the company, named MacDonald, so as to obtain particulars about MacCrimmon's family.

"No use, sir!" said MacDonald. "MacCrimmon was no MacCrimmon. His name was MacIver; but his father was drowned, and his mother died, and old MacCrimmon brought him up with his own bairns.

"Nobody told him that he wasn't a MacCrimmon," MacDonald continued. "You see, he never had the scar o' the seal, which is proof o't!"

CHAPTER IX

STORM-KELPIES

WHEN the Duke of Anjou was laying siege to a stronghold on the coast of Naples in 1381, a necromancer constructed a bridge that carried ten soldiers abreast, until any that passed over the said bridge made "the sign of the crosse on hym, then all went to nought," according to Froissart, "and they that were on the bridge fell into the sea."

The Gizzen Briggs.

This legend has a parallel in the folk-lore of Ross and of Sutherland. So tired became the kelpies of crossing the Dornoch Firth in cockle-shells between Dornoch and Tain that they decided to build a bridge. Piles for the central and only pier of this bridge were to be driven down into that quicksand and whirlpool at the entrance to the Dornoch Firth known as the Gizzen Briggs. Forthwith the kelpies applied themselves to this gigantic undertaking. When the structure was nearing completion, however, a native of the country, in passing over it, raised his hands in awe, and called upon God to shower his goodness on the bridge and its builders. At sound of 'The Name,' both work and workmen were engulfed by the tide; and a perilous shoal then commenced to accumulate round the wreckage.

To this day the Gizzen Briggs present a danger to ships navigating in this locality. I well remember how, when I was holidaying as a school-boy near Tain, some twenty years ago, the auxiliary engine of a small sailing-vessel, laden with timber and coal, making for Bonar-Bridge, at the head of the Dornoch Firth, failed, and how the vessel consequently was carried out by the tide, and swept into the Gizzen Briggs and perdition. My recollection is that,

despite frantic efforts to reach the doomed ship by life-boats from both sides of the Firth, the crew perished, and the skipper was rescued only after he had clung to the top-mast for three days and three nights. This mishap filled the countryside with a sense of tragedy; and everyone spoke freely of the fate that had befallen both vessel and crew at the evil hands of the Gizzen Briggs kelpies.

Fate of the *Rotterdam.*

Of the Gizzen Briggs, yet another folk-tale is told, recalling the legend of *The Flying Dutchman.*

There sailed the Seven Seas long ago a wicked captain in a ship which he himself had built in the hope of subduing the world by his tyrannies. To his ship this captain gave the name of the *Rotterdam.* Once she was launched and manned, he boasted that he now feared neither God nor man. So large was this vessel that on her deck were a garden in which grew all manner of fruit and vegetable, and fields in which cattle and sheep grazed freely.

In expectation of discovering some north-west passage, the reckless captain turned his bow toward the Dornoch Firth. But, knowing neither the fairways nor the perils of this region, he ran his ship on to the Gizzen Briggs. To this day, it is claimed, the fishermen dwelling by these shores identify the spot where the *Rotterdam* came to grief, for at times they see her top-gallant and her bargee floating on the tide. They are of opinion, moreover, that the wicked captain and his crew must still be alive beneath the waves, since in calm weather they believe that they hear them praying and singing the psalms alternately, in the trust that on the Day of Judgment the captain may receive pardon for all the sins he committed throughout the world, on land and sea.

Kelpies of the Corrievreckan.

Between the islands of Jura and Scarba, off the west coast of Argyll, runs the Gulf of Corrievreckan. This treacherous tide-way of currents and whirlpools is said to be haunted by the fiercest of the Highland storm-kelpies.

Similar demons of the sea are believed to inhabit the channel separating the north of Scarba and the island called Lunga. This area of the ocean is referred to by the Gaelic-speaking natives of Western Argyll as the *Bealach a' Choin Ghlais,* the Pass, or Strait, of the Grey Dog, a kelpie of evil design. Sometimes, however, it is alluded to as the Little Gulf, so as to distinguish it from its larger and more turbulent neighbour, the Gulf of Corrievreckan, which often goes by the name of the Great Gulf. The former, at its narrowest part, measures about a cable, whereas the latter at its narrowest measures roughly six cables.

Corrievreckan is simply a corruption of the two Gaelic words, *coire,* meaning a kettle or cauldron, and *brecan,* denoting speckled, or varigated, like tartan. So the name literally means Cauldron of the Speckled Seas.

Through the Gulf of Corrievreckan sweep the great tides that converge in this vicinity, and whirl in whirlpools forever. The most noted whirlpool of the Corrievreckan is that known as the *Cailleach,* meaning the Old Hag. She is believed to be a female kelpie; and her sinister activities are well recorded in the sea-lore of Western Europe.

This whirlpool is the *Charybdis Brecani* mentioned by Adamnan, biographer of St. Columba. "It is the confluence of many seas, each pouring itself into the place of the other," says that ancient work known as the *Dinnseanchus,* "until they are swallowed down to the bottom, and until it is like an open cauldron, sucking and disgorging its draughts, so that its roar is like distant thunder. And it was into this that Brecan (son of the King of Norway) was drawn, and was drowned, with his fifty boats, when he fled out of Erin from his father."

The version given in Cormac's Glossary is as follows: "The seas whirl round like revolving compasses, each taking the place of the other, like the paddles of a millwheel, until they are sucked into the depths, so that the *Coire* remains with its mouth wide open; and it would suck even the whole of Erin into its yawning gullet. Brecan, son of Maine, son of Nial Naoighiallach (Neil of the Nine Hostages), had fifty curraghs trading between Erin and Alban. They fell afterwards on that *Coire,* and it

swallowed them altogether, and not even news of their destruction escaped from it."

According to an old tale recounted by Dr. Gillies in his book on Nether Lorne, Brecan, in order to prove his love, agreed to spend three days and three nights in his galley at anchor in the Corrievreckan. On the advice of the wise men of Lochlann, he anchored in this treacherous whirlpool with three ropes attached to a ponderous hook. One rope was made of hemp. Another was made of wool. And the third was made of the hair of guiltless women. During the first night the hempen rope gave way. On the second night the wool parted. And on the third night the last rope broke. Thus perished Brecan and his galley, much to the joy of the storm-kelpies. They say that his black dog afterwards retrieved his body, and drew it ashore at Jura. And the Islesfolks buried him in a cave by the shores of Jura still called *Uamh Bhreacain,* Cave of Brecan, within hearing of the Corrievreckan.

Of disasters and escapes associated with these storm-kelpies, many folk-tales are related round the peat-fires of Argyll and her islands—folk-tales of how mariners caught in the whirlpool of the Corrievreckan closed down the hatches and remained in the interior of their vessels until they were whirled down to the bottom of the sea, and then disgorged again, and of how ships on the verge of doom were saved by the throwing into the vortex of a cap or of a fragment of cork, which appeased the wild waters until they had sailed beyond their influence.

The Blue Men of the Minch.

In the narrow tide-way separating Lewis from the group of small islands known as the Shiant or 'Charmed' Isles live those storm-kelpies of the Hebrides called the Blue Men of the Minch. The tide-way itself is known to the natives by the Gaelic name, *Sruth nam Fear Gorma,* Stream of the Blue Men. These kelpies are accredited with maintaining the waters of their Stream, and also the waters in the neighbourhood of the Shiant Isles, in a perpetual state of turmoil. Many an unsuspecting vessel has been lured to

her doom by the wiles of the Blue Men, for they are deft deceivers as well as deft riders of the storm.

The person from whom the Rev. John Gregorson Campbell obtained his information about the Blue Men of the Minch was insistent that he himself had seen one of them. He described him thus: "A blue-coloured man, with a long, grey face, and floating from the waist out of the water, followed the boat in which he was for a long time, and was occasionally so near that the observer might have put his hand upon him."[1] The Rev. John Gregorson Campbell was minister of Tiree from 1861 until 1891, and collected, entirely from oral sources, a vast quantity of material dealing with the legends and superstitions of the Highlands and Islands.

According to another authority on matters Celtic,[2] the chief of the Blue Men reared himself waist-high among the billows, and shouted couplets to the skipper of any passing vessel likely to fall into his mesh. But sometimes the skipper was able to answer him back in telling couplets, as is shown by the following free translation of a poetic conversation that took place in the Gaelic:

Blue Chief: Man of the black cap, what do you say
As your proud ship cleaves the brine?

Skipper: My speedy ship takes the shortest way,
And I'll follow you line by line.

Blue Chief: My men are eager, my men are ready
To drag you below the waves.

Skipper: My ship is speedy, my ship is steady;
If it sank, it would wreck your caves.

Never before had the chief of the Blue Men been answered so aptly, so unanswerably. And so he and his kelpie brethren retired to their caverns beneath the waves of the Minch, unable to inveigle to its destruction the vessel navigated by *that* particular skipper.

[1] *The Superstitions of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland,* by J. G. Campbell (MacLehose, 1900).

[2] *Scottish Folk-lore and Folk Life,* by Donald A. MacKenzie (Blackie, 1935).

A Blue Man Captured.

Once upon a time, a ship passing through the Stream of the Blue Men came upon a blue-coloured man asleep on its waters. The sleeper, for all his nimbleness, was captured, and taken aboard. Since captain and crew regarded him as belonging to a supernatural race, they bound him, hand and foot, with the strongest rope they had aboard, until they felt assured that he was powerless. But scarcely had the ship proceeded its own length thereafter when two men were seen to be following closely in its wake.

One was overheard to say to the other: "Duncan will be one man."

The other likewise was overheard to reply: "Farquhar will be two."

Thereupon, the blue-coloured man, lying bound on the deck, broke his bonds as though they had been made of gossamer, and leapt overboard to return home with his rescuers to the Stream of the Blue Men.

In Lewis and in Harris, and also in the western parts of Skye, the tradition of the Blue Men of the Minch is still current.

It is believed in the Isles that the fallen angels were expelled from heaven in three groups which are closely akin to one another. The Faeries came to earth: the Blue Men were relegated to the sea: the Nimble Men (*Na Fir Chlis*) were banished to the sky, where to this day, in frosty weather, they appear as the Merry Dancers, or Northern Lights. And they say in the Outer Hebrides that, when the Merry Men enter conflict, the blood of their slain and wounded falls to earth, where, in congealing, it turns into those coloured stones known as 'blood-stones.' My own kinsfolk in the Hebrides frequently allude to the stains on such 'blood-stones' as Elf's blood!

CHAPTER X

BIRD LORE

The Oystercatcher.

Several West Highland folk-tales of birds and animals are associated with Christ and His enemies. It is related in the Islands that, when Christ was being pursued from one Hebridean isle to another, he was hidden at low tide by two oystercatchers, who covered Him with seaweed, and kept watch over Him until His enemies had passed. And it is supposed that for this act of grace the oystercatcher was chosen to be the *gille* or man-servant of St. Bridget, Christ's foster-mother. Hence the origin of *gille-bridean,* the oystercatcher's Gaelic name.

No bird has occupied a more prominent place in the lore and legend of Celtic Scotland than has the oystercatcher; and Hebridean folk-lore is loud in its praise of this beautiful creature. They say in the Isles that originally the colour of the oystercatcher was black, and that, in recognition of the bird's service to Christ, it was awarded a white plumage on the breast in the shape of a cross. The breast and wings of the oystercatcher appear for all the world like a white cross, when the bird is seen flying toward one.

In Gaelic the cry of the oystercatcher is "*Bi glic, bi glic*; *bi glic, bi glic*!", meaning 'be wise,' 'be prudent,' 'take care.' And this cry is commonly regarded by West Highland mariners and fishermen as a warning of the approach of a storm.

A Legend of the Duck and the Hen.

A folk-tale somewhat similar to that in which the oystercatcher concealed Christ under the seaweed is told of the manner in which Christ, when pursued, came to a croft in the Isles while the crofter was winnowing the chaff from

his corn in the open. The crofter readily hid Christ under the heap of corn that he was winnowing; and, to make Him the more safe until His foes had passed, he sought to enlarge the heap with great quantities of corn from the barn. Meanwhile the poultry—ducks and hens—made for the heap in his absence. The ducks confined their activities to trampling the heap, and to eating as they trampled. But it was not thus with the hens, for they were not content until they had scattered the greater part of the heap with their claws. When the crofter returned from his barn, he discovered that the hens, by their scraping, had actually exposed Christ to view. And thus, they say, the hen earned for herself and her offspring an earth-bound heritage, and a dread of rain and hail, of wind and sleet, of thunder and lightning. Moreover, it was decreed that her bath should be of dust, and not of water, that she should have no oil in her body for the preening of her feathers, and that the only joy of her life should be the joy of dry land.

But it was otherwise with the duck. She had confined herself to eating the grain without scattering it. So it was decreed that the duck should be web-toed, and not bound to remain on dry land, that she should exult in rain and hail, wind and sleet, thunder and lightning, that water should be her bath, that she should have abundant oil for the preening of her feathers, and that her life should consist of no fewer than four joys—the joy of land, the joy of water, the joy of under-water, and the joy of air.

Thus it is that the duck is happiest when the hen is saddest, most hopeful when the hen is most despairing, most joyous when the hen is most fear-ful. This quaint conception survives in the ancient Gaelic saying, "You are as happy as a duck expecting thunder."

The converse, "Your heart is shaking as would a hen in thunder," is often said in the Hebrides of a person in great fear.

The Happy Hog.

There lived on the Ross of Mull a man who went forth to sow his fields with oat seeds so few that they merely filled

his apron. Though he scattered the seeds extravagantly among the furrows, his neighbours noticed that the quantity he carried never seemed to lessen. This annoyed them greatly. One day, therefore, they said to him: "Ill luck attend you! Is the apron *never* to be empty?" Whereupon there leapt out from among the oat seeds a little, brown bird that betook itself, no one knew whither. With the bird's departure, the supply of seeds soon became exhausted.

For some reason now unknown, the people of the Ross gave to this little, brown bird the Gaelic name of the *Torc Sona*, meaning the Happy Hog. And since that time, when good luck befalls any of the man's descendants, it is customary to enquire of them whether the *Torc Sona* still ministers to the family.

Two Black Crows.

Upon a time there dwelt in Moray a small proprietor who, in early life, had learnt the black art of witchcraft at an Italian school. One morning, after a night's frost, he instructed his coachman to drive him in his carriage, drawn as usual by four horses, across the thin ice covering the surface of Loch Spynie. In presence of his coachman, this man versed in black magic loaded a brace of pistols, threatening him in so doing of the fate that would overtake him, if he dared look back while the carriage was on its way across the ice.

Over the film of ice passed the carriage-and-four. As soon as the leading horses placed their hoofs on *terra firma*, the mystified coachman turned round to find two black crows seated on the carriage behind him. Thereupon the ice gave way; and down into Loch Spynie went the carriage and the wheelers. Had it not been for the leaders, who now pulled strenuously to avoid their sharing the same fate, wheelers and carriage would have disappeared in the loch. And it was indeed fortunate for the coachman that in the adventure the powder in the pistol had got wet, with the result that his life was saved unintentionally.

Not until the crows assumed the shape of two imps

familiar in the locality was the coachman able to account for his uncanny experience.

The Swan of Good Omen.

In the Highlands and Islands the swan to this day is regarded as a bird of good omen. Legend has it that swans are devout women *fo geasa*—under enchantment—metamorphosed as were those human beings who were changed into such creatures as seals and widgeons. Thus it is that swans remain comparatively free from molestation at the hands of mankind in Celtic Scotland. In the Outer Hebrides, as in the west of Ireland, it is considered as heinous a crime to injure a swan as to injure a seal. One reason why it was deemed unlucky to kill or injure a swan was because it was said to have on the tip of its tongue a drop of the devil's blood.

There is a story told of a woman who discovered a wounded swan by the shore of a lochan near her house, and who took it home with her to dress its wounds. For a considerable period this swan remained under her care. It happened that at the time the woman had an ailing child; and she observed that the child's health improved as the swan's wounds healed. By the time that the swan was able to take to the open again, the child was completely recovered. The woman therefore believed that the swan, upon which she had bestowed so much care and attention, was in reality a devout lady ' under spell.'

It is said, too, that to see seven swans, or a multiple of seven swans, is a sure sign of the coming of seven years of peace and plenty.

The Cuckoo of Ill Omen.

The visit to St. Kilda of the cuckoo, which I believe is very seldom, was said to presage the death either of MacLeod of MacLeod, the proprietor of the Island, or of his steward. The arrival of the heron, on the other hand, was regarded by the more superstitious of the inhabitants as the visit of a witch from Lewis.

In 1927, my friend, Dr Alexander Cockburn, heard the

cuckoo in the loneliness of the Great Glen of Hirta (St. Kilda). At first he dared not tell the natives, being acquainted with their superstition. When he told them in the end, he was not a little disappointed that they failed to exhibit the perturbation he had anticipated. Neither MacLeod nor his factor died that year. It was not until 1929 that Norman, XXIIIrd Chief of the MacLeods of Dunvegan, died.

Clan MacAndy of the Widgeons.

Not to be confused with Bernera in Loch Roag, nor yet with Bernera(y), the most southerly of the Outer Hebrides, is the island of the same name situated in the legend-haunted Sound of Harris, and once inhabited by a sept known as the Clan MacAndy—*Clann 'ic Anndaidh.* In common with their North Uist neighbours, the MacCodrums, who were transformed into seals, some members of the Clan Andy were metamorphosed into ducks.

Now, the MacAndys had tilled the barren soil of Berneray until the meagreness of their garner compelled them to seek more congenial pastures. Came a time when the community was divided (so the legend goes) into two groups —a land group, under the direction of the sun, and a maritime group, guided in its activities by moon and stars. And it was when the sea colony of the MacAndy sept rebuked the land colony for the manner in which it conducted its affairs that, by the magic touch of a Druid wand, the former was placed ' under spell,' as a result of which the members composing it were forced to forfeit their human form for that of the wedge-tailed *lach* or widgeon.

To this very day the old inhabitants of Boreray and Pabbay and the numberless islands imperilling the course of the navigator in the Sound of Harris will be telling you weird yarns concerning the MacAndys of Berneray; and, whenever they see a bird of long, pointed wing and wedge-shaped tail, gliding buoyantly on the tide, or flying apparently without exertion through the air, they will be wishing that the lot of those who till in barren, stony

solitudes were as happy as that of the maritime branch of the Clan MacAndy—the branch that had to abandon the hardships of Berneray for the amenities of wind and tide, of quivered star and sickled moon.

The folks of Berneray declare that, when the long-tailed duck is uttering his sharp, impatient cry, he actually is sneering at his less fortunate brethren, who toil upon the land.

The Language of the Widgeons.

And there's an old Gaelic fragment come down to us, in which the language of the *Clann 'ic Anndaidh* has been reduced to writing. Some believe this fragment to have been composed by Sir Norman MacLeod of Berneray, who, as you will remember, was knighted after the Battle of Worcester in 1651, and whose sword is one of the many interesting relics preserved at Dunvegan Castle. The following is a literal translation of one of the verses composing this fragment:

"Clan MacAndy!
Clan MacAndy!
Weakly clansmen!
Puny clansmen!
Vioch! voch! vuch!
Uv-uv! uv-uv! uv-uv!
Ur! ur! ah!"

The widgeon, or long-tailed *lach*, is native to Hebridean waters; and without his fitful presence the Sounds of Harris and Berneray, the Sounds of Eriskay and Barra, would lack much. And you should lie in concealment by the primitive landing-place at the Leac Bhan (the northernmost point of North Uist, from which the Island of Berneray is distant less than three cables), when this clan is skimming across the troubled waters of the Narrows, or bobbing rapturously in the tide-churned inlets of Bays Loch and Loch Borve.

The Black-throated Diver's Language.

The black-throated diver's language also has been committed to writing in the Isles. You know, of course, that the nest of this bird is built within ready reach of the water. If, in time of drought, the water recede out of easy reach, the female bird on her nest may be heard uttering the Gaelic equivalent of the words:

"Drink! drink!
The loch is ebbing!
Water! water!
The power of limb is
leaving me!"

If, on the other hand, there be heavy rains, such as may cause the waters of the loch to encroach upon her nest, she will fly overhead, and cry in bewilderment:

"My sorrow!
My eggs!
My chicks!
My brood
In the flood!
My gifts!
My treasures!
My troubles!"

A Legend of Eilean Donan.

And here is the pretty legend I have narrated in my recent book, *Somewhere in Scotland,* of how Eilean Donan Castle came to be built originally. There was an ancient belief in the Scottish Highlands, and also in the Hebrides, that a person became imbued with supernatural powers if in infancy he received his first sip out of the skull of a raven. The story goes that long, long ago there lived in Kintail a petty chief who, in order to put this belief to the test, saw to it that, when his infant son was old enough to be weaned, he had his first drink out of a raven's skull, with the result that, when the infant grew to man's estate, he could understand the language of the birds. There came a

The Gunnery of the MacLeods of Berneray, in the Sound of Harris.

Part of the Sound of Harris as viewed from the moors of Ensay.

[*Facing P.* 128

Loch Long, the Cobbler, and the entrance to Glen Croe, on the Road to Rest-and-be-Thankful and Inveraray.

Arrochar and Ben Lomond as seen from the shores of Loch Long, on the Road to Glen Croe and Rest-and-be-Thankful.

[*Facing P.* 129

day when his father, impatient with the noise that starlings were making in the eaves, asked his son to interpret their conversation. "They are saying that one day you will be waiting on me at your own table," the son replied.

So incensed by this remark was the chief that his son felt obliged to quit his home. In course of time he arrived in France, where he learnt that the king of that country was pestered with the chirpings of an inordinate bevy of sparrows about his palace. His offer to the king was accepted, that he should visit the birds at the palace, and hear what explanation they had to give for their continual commotion. Wherefore he duly interviewed the sparrows, and soon learnt that their perpetual wrangling was due to a long-standing dispute among them. This dispute he settled amicably, to the satisfaction both of the birds themselves and of the king.

Now, this king of France felt so grateful to the wanderer from Scotland for his having restored the peace of his palace that he bestowed upon him a galley, fully equipped and fully manned. During the wanderer's voyages in this galley, he visited many strange lands. It so happened that on one occasion he found himself in the territory of another king, whose palace was as infested with rats as that of the king of France had been disturbed by the noise of querulous sparrows. Against this plague of rats the king's household was utterly helpless. News of his plight soon reached the ears of the young adventurer from Kintail; and so he proffered his services to the king of this strange land, just as he had done in the case of the king of France. Aboard his galley he carried a cat that drove the rats out of the palace so thoroughly that the king gave him a hogshead of gold in exchange for the cat.

After an absence from Scotland extending over some ten years, the wanderer sailed for home with his hogshead of gold. And they say in Kintail that he anchored his galley in the channel between Totaig and the rocky islet on which now stands the restored Castle of Eilean Donan. So sightly was the galley, and so richly laden, that her arrival occasioned something of a sensation among the humble clachans of Kintail—so much so, in sooth, that, when its

owner came casually to the door of his father's dwelling, he was received as hospitably as though he were a king arrived in Highland waters from a far country. In his father's house he was promptly given a meal; and his father knew him not. And the prophecy of the birds was fulfilled when none other than his father waited on him, ministering to his needs.

The son, when he had been waited on duly by his father, disclosed his identity, and recalled the circumstances that had necessitated his leaving home years before. Even then the father was uncertain of his guest. It was not until the guest bared a birth-mark on his shoulder that his relatives were really convinced as to who he was. And they say in Kintail that so great was his knowledge of the world as the result of his wanderings, and so profound the confidence placed in him by most of the important personages in Scotland at this time, that King Alexander commanded him to build the Castle of Eilean Donan with a view to checking the inroads of the Northmen, who meanwhile were harrying the seaboard of the West Highlands and Islands.

So that's how Eilean Donan came to be built, they say.

CHAPTER XI

ANIMAL LORE

THE folk-tales concerning animals are of a wide range. They deal, on the one hand, with the monsters of immeasurable dimensions and, on the other, with the gigelorum. In the folk-lore of the Highlands and Islands the gigelorum is reputed to be the minutest of all the animals in the world. So minute is it, in fact, that it is able to build its nest in the mite's ear. "And that is all that is known about it," concludes the Rev. J. Gregorson Campbell.

In the Northern Highlands the natives greatly feared a tiny creature called the lavellan, which is said to have had the power of paralysing cattle at any range within forty yards. Thomas Pennant, who made inquiries both in Sutherland and in Caithness, came to the conclusion that the lavellan was a water shrew-mouse—the little creature that to-day the folks of Sutherland speak of as the water-vole. Belief that it harmed the cattle was widespread. Thus it was that, when a specimen was caught and killed, its skin was preserved, and ailing cattle were made to drink a little of the water in which this skin had been dipped.

The Elusive Feolagan.

This reminds one of the feolagan, an elusive little fellow of the mousy order. He is said to be responsible each year for the death of great numbers of sheep pastured on the moors of the Hebrides. They tell me that his favourite resort in the Isles is among the hills around Kebock Head, in Lewis. This creature resembles his more domesticated cousin in everything except size—he is a little larger. Shepherds in Lewis declare that a sheep is paralysed from

the moment the feolagan walks over its back, and that the only proved antidote is to catch the particular feolagan and cause him to walk over the sheep's back again, in the opposite direction. I am assured by a friend in Lewis[1] that, until fairly recent times, a feolagan, when captured, was preserved in a jar containing salt, some grains of which were sprinkled on the back of a sheep believed to have been incapacitated by this elusive creature. If a sheep recovered after the sprinkling of such salt, it was regarded as a sure indication that a feolagan had been responsible for its malady.

Highland folk-tales in which mice play a part are scarce; but those with which we are familiar prove that mice were looked upon as creatures of evil omen. The grass-mouse, or lesser shrew, was suspected of having the power of paralysing livestock. It is not so long since it was customary in the Outer Hebrides to capture a shrew, and carry it sunwise round the loins of a cow or sheep, or even of a horse, that was ailing, or that had suddenly developed lameness. This was done in the belief that an animal would recover from any disease brought on by a shrew that, of its own accord, had passed over part of its body.

Many years ago, when the late Alexander Carmichael, to whom I have made many references in these pages, was collecting runes and other material in Uist, he and an old woman happend to notice a shrew making for a house. Instantly the woman grasped Carmichael's hand, and, pointing to the shrew in great anxiety, exclaimed in the Gaelic: "Jesus, Son of Mary, be with us! This one is seeking someone!"

Carmichael records that, a few days later, the old woman lost her husband.

The King Otter.

According to Highland tradition, the skin of the king otter has certain occult powers, and is said to be worth as many guinea-pieces as it would take to cover it. As a rule, the king otter is seen at the head of a group of no fewer

[1] See *Searching the Hebrides with a Camera*, pp. 155 *et seq.*

than seven of its kind; and the only part of its exterior believed to be vulnerable is the white spot under its chin, no larger than a sixpence.

The killing of a king otter, they say, presages the death either of a human being or of a dog. To fire at this creature without hitting the vital spot was followed by fatal consequences. And so immune to the weapons of men was its skin that, even when one was killed, its skin became a precious heirloom. It was firmly believed that a fragment of the skin retained in the house not only protected both the house and its inhabitants from misfortune, but also 'charmed' soldiers who, in going off to the wars, were in danger from arrow, sword, or bullet.

Tradition has it that many who followed Charlie to Culloden carried with them a tiny piece of the king otter's skin, and that this is how they escaped injury or death when swords were clashing everywhere around them, and bullets falling upon them as thickly as hailstones in time of storm.

The Legend of the Beetle.

Both in Uist and in Sutherland legend has it that the sacred beetle and the beetle one finds about a graveyard had an experience not unlike that of the hen and the duck, which I have related in the previous chapter. When the Jews were searching for Christ, they chanced to meet a sacred beetle and a graveyard beetle, both on the prowl for food. When asked by the Jews whether they had seen the Christ pass by, the graveyard beetle, more talkative than his companion, immediately retorted: "Yes, I have. He passed this way but yesterday evening, when the folks of the township were digging a grave."

"False! false!" cried the sacred beetle, eager to baffle the pursuers, even at the cost of perpetrating a falsehood. "It is a year and a day since Christ, the Son of Mary, passed this way, for I and my children were out foraging by the roadside as He went by."

So the graveyard beetle, because he was so ready to betray Christ into the hands of his enemies, was always killed when found, whereas the life of the sacred beetle

was spared. But, for his having told a falsehood, he was always put on his back. Indeed, it was considered remiss in the Hebrides to pass a sacred beetle without turning him on his back. If, however, he succeeded in getting on to his feet again (which upturned beetles often experience some difficulty in doing!), it was regarded as highly improper to subject him to any further interference.

The version of this legend that is current in Sutherland runs as follows.

When Mary and her family were on their flight into Egypt, they passed through a field, in which men were sowing the grain. Mary spoke to the men, and implored of them that, should they be asked whether a fugitive family had passed their way, they were to reply that such a family had, but as long ago as when they were sowing their fields. The sowers promised to obey her. In meet season the green shoots began to appear, then the ears, and then the full ears.

In the ripeness of harvest-time, the sowers of the spring were the reapers of the autumn. As they reaped, the king's soldiers came upon them, and inquired of them whether they had seen a man and a woman passing through the land, leading an ass, and carrying a child. Faithful to their promise, they replied that they had, but that this was when they were *sowing* the grain.

As it happened, a grave-digger beetle and a sacred beetle were on a foraging expedition near by. And, when the king's soldiers were on the point of abandoning their search for Mary and her Child, the grave-digger beetle lifted up his voice in officious mood, and said: *"An dè! an dè! chaidh Mac Dhe seachad!:* Yesterday! Yesterday! the Son of God passed by!"

"False! false!" interjected the sacred beetle. "A full year it was yestreen, since the Son of God passed by!"

Ever since that day the grave-digger, or grave-yard beetle, has been killed at sight in the Highlands and Islands; and I, myself, have known people to kill any unsuspecting member of this species that came into view, and in killing it to repeat an old Gaelic saying, of which the English equivalent would be: "Beetle! beetle! you will not live to tell any more tales!"

Included in Carmichael's precious collection of Gaelic hymns and prayers are no fewer than three 'Poems of the Beetle' (*Duain nan Daol*). The following fair translation accompanies one of them—

When Christ was under the wood,
And enemies were pursuing Him,
The crooked one of deception
Said to the black beetle and the butterfly—

"Saw ye pass to-day or yesterday
The Son of my love, the Son of God?"
"We saw, we saw!" said the black beetle,
"The Son of redemption pass yesterday."

"False! false! false!"
Said the little clay beetle of horses:
"A full year yesterday
The Son of God went by."

The Last Wolf.

Folk-tales of the last wolf in Scotland are as common as are those of the last of the giants. Tradition in Moray accredits a man of the name of MacQueen with having killed the last wolf. Word had been conveyed to the MacKintosh at Moy Hall that a "black beast," supposed to have been a wolf, had carried off two children, who were crossing the hills from Calder. Thereupon MacQueen, a stalker of great strength and stature, was directed to arrange for the 'driving' of the countryside on a certain day, and from a place agreed upon. On the appointed day the MacKintosh and his tinchel assembled at the tryst, where, hour after hour, they waited impatiently for MacQueen and his dogs. Just as they were on the point of abandoning the project and of returning to their respective homes, up strolled MacQueen in a fashion so lackadaisical that the MacKintosh lost his temper and addressed him angrily.

"*Ciod e a' chabhag?*"—"What's the hurry?" inquired MacQueen.

Before the MacKintosh had time to reply, MacQueen drew out from under his plaid the head of a wolf, remarking as he tossed it on the heath in an offhand manner: "*Sin e dhuibh. That's* it to you!"

The hills around Rannoch used to be avoided by travellers because of the wolves that infested them. In this locality the wolf tradition survives in the name of an out-of-the-way clachan situated on the right of the road leading from Dun Alasdair toward Glen Erichdie, and close to a stream that goes by a Gaelic name meaning the Burn of the Yellow Peats.

In olden times there was a mill at Mullinavaddie; and the miller's name—as one might have expected in this part of Scotland—was Robertson.

It is recounted that one fine day, while the miller's wife was stirring the brose with a spirtle, a wolf coolly walked in, and made a bee-line for the cot in which lay her infant child. But the courageous Robertson woman came to grips with the wolf, and struck the fierce creature on a vital spot with her spirtle, It immediately dropped dead. The place is still called Mullinavaddie, the Mill of the Wolf. This wolf, they say, was the last wolf seen alive in Perthshire.

The last wolf in Argyll also is said to have met its end at a mill, and at the hands of a woman, who in her encounter was less fortunate than the miller's wife at Mullinavaddie. The story is told that, while on her way from Braevallich to Inveraray, a woman belonging to the neighbourhood was overtaken on the shelterless moor by a wolf, and was afterwards found dead near a mill at a place called Braleckan, where she had plunged her knife into the heart of the animal, which lay dead beside her.

According to Thomas Pennant, the wolf slain in Lochaber by Cameron of Locheil in 1680 is supposed to have ended the species in Scotland. In the auction-catalogue of the London Museum in 1818, there appears the following entry: "Wolf—a noble animal in a large case. The last wolf killed in Scotland by Sir Ewan Cameron." This entry surely is a little ambiguous!

Despite this, traditions of the last wolf were circulated widely a hundred years later, particularly in the northern

counties of Scotland. That as late as the seventeenth century wolves were a menace in these parts is shown by the fact that here, as elsewhere in Scotland, the practice developed of burying the dead on islands, in order to protect the graves from the depredations of wolves.

A little more than a decade ago a memorial was erected at Lothbeg, in Sutherland, on which is engraved this inscription:

> TO MARK THE SPOT NEAR WHICH (ACCORDING TO SCROPE'S "DAYS OF DEER-STALKING") THE LAST WOLF IN SUTHERLAND WAS KILLED BY THE HUNTER, POLSON, IN OR ABOUT THE YEAR 1700. THIS STONE WAS ERECTED BY HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF PORTLAND, K.G.; A.D. 1924.

According to William Scrope, the story of Polson is that he and two young men (one of whom was his son) discovered near a heap of stones a cavern, which turned out to be the lair of a wolf. The son crept into the lair by a narrow fissure in the rocks, and there found a number of cubs. These he immediately began to kill when suddenly, to his father's horror, the infuriated dam came bounding home to her den, having heard the feeble cries of her cubs. As she dashed into the entrance, Polson is said to have caught her bushy tail, and to have held her fast, with the fore-part of her body wedged in the narrow fissure leading to the cavern.

When the son within the cavern inquired of his father what was excluding the light, the old hunter exclaimed: "If the root of the tail break, you will soon be knowing that!"

Scrope tells us that in the end Polson succeeded in mortally wounding the wolf with his dirk.

A Fox's Sagacity.

Although to-day the fox is not so common in the Highlands as he has been, our folk-tales are loud in extolling his wisdom and cunning. There is a tale told of a sagacious

fox at the Mull of Kintyre that was careful never to pursue his depredations within a twenty-mile limit of his lair.

When he would be raiding the sheep-folds of Kintyre, the farmers and crofters used to send their dogs after him! and it was believed that the fox was in the habit of evading his pursuers by leaping across a certain gorge in the neighbourhood. After each chase, one or two dogs were always found dead at the base of the gorge, but never a fox. How the fox was able to find a footing on the opposite side of the gorge, no one knew, for there was not even a cranny large enough for the feet of a small bird, or even of a squirrel. It was obvious, however, that the dogs in their pursuit simply leapt to their death at this gorge.

For years the inhabitants of Kintyre were puzzled at the manner in which this fox evaded capture, and in which the pursuit of him always resulted in the loss of a dog or two. So, they set out for the gorge one day, provided with a long rope, and accompanied by a young fellow who was accredited with being more daring than his neighbours. Down the gorge they lowered the young fellow, and he carefully examining every nook of the rocks as they lowered him. Several feet from the top, and on the same side, a number of plane and ash saplings grew out of a cleft. On examining these closely, he found that a certain ash sapling, more lithe than the others, had a few curious scratches upon it, and that this sapling, when he pressed upon it with his foot, was bent to an angle that might permit of a small creature hopping from the end of it to a tiny ledge on the opposite wall of the gorge, if such creature had but the weight to bend the sapling to the required angle. He noticed, too, that, precarious as was the foot-hold just at the point where the tip of the sapling tended to touch the farther side of the gorge, there led away from that point a ledge that seemed wide enough to accommodate the feet of a deft-footed fox. And, so, before the young man came to the top again, he cut through the sapling whereby he suspected the fox habitually effected his escape. Instead of removing it altogether, however, he bound it with a flimsy thread or two, merely to maintain it in its original position.

If this artful fox be in the habit of using this sapling, he said to himself, he ought to be found dead at the foot of the gorge, when next he is chased in this direction. And, sure enough, the fox met his death shortly afterwards. He was found dead at the base of the cleft, with the sapling shoot in his teeth.

This fox, say the folks of Kintyre, exhibited greater sagacity than has any other member of his tribe in his having selected an ash sapling to a less flexible one, in arresting his fall in mid-air by catching the sapling with his teeth and claws, and in discovering that he could bend it in such a way as to make it possible for him to land on the opposite precipice. And this spot is known in Kintyre to this day as *Creag na t-Sionnaich*, Rock of the Fox.

The unusual wisdom and cunning of this particular fox are proverbial in many parts of the Highlands. In Argyll an over-confident person is often warned against being led after the manner in which the red fox of the Mull of Kintyre led the dogs over the cliffs; and a cunning person is sometimes described as being as crafty as the fox of the Mull.

Three Kindly Kidlings.

About eighty years ago, there lived in Barra a certain Hector Boyd, who was far famed for the mode in which he could recount traditional fragments concerning animals. He used to tell a story of how a grey goat, on returning to the fold, discovered that a fox had made off with her three kids. Black with real melancholy was the grey goat, to find that in her absence her three little ones had been stolen. So, she took her way to the abode of the russet-dog (fox). On coming to it, she scrambled on to the roof; and the russet-dog, hearing movement about the thatch of his dwelling, cried out:

"Who is that on the top of my bothy, maiden my dearie,
That will not leave my cauldrons to boil,
That will not leave my bannocks to bake,
That will not let my little ones go to the well?"

To this the grey goat replied :

" Here am I, a grey goat, harried,
Seeking three kindly kidlings,
And the grey-breasted buck,
And the buck lad."

Then answered the russet-dog from within :

" Well, then, by the earth that is beneath,
By the ether overhead,
By the sun that goes down,
I have never seen thy set of kids."

Not a bird in the flocks about the Barra Isles did the grey goat fail to question as to the fate of her three kids; and not a bird could assist her in her sorry plight. However, one day, while she was searching the seashore, a straw broke a leg of the hapless grey goat; and she hirpled home to find—

" Three kindly kidlings grey,
Grey-breasted,
With backs grey-backed,
And the buck grey-headed."

In course of time the grey goat went to the abode of the russet-dog for an explanation of his practices; but Master Reynard slyly repudiated her imputations in the following terms :

" By the blackthorn and the briar,
By the sun beneath my feet,
By the sun that has gone down,
Never have I seen thy set of kids."

And never thereafter did the russet-dog put trouble upon the grey goat.

A Keg of Butter.

About a century ago, there lived on the Isle of Vatersay (one of the Barra Isles) an octogenarian named Neil MacNeil, who used to recite a story in which a russet-dog

(fox) and a wild-dog (wolf) quarrelled over a keg of butter. It so happened that, while searching for food upon the seashore of Vatersay, a fox and a wolf, who shared the same den and conducted their predatory expeditions in company with one another, chanced upon a keg of butter, which they agreed to conceal in the ground. On the following day the fox went out, unbeknown to the wolf. When he returned, he told the wolf that he had been invited to attend a baptism. He speedily attired himself in his best raiment, and quitted the den in a hundred hurries, that he might sample clandestinely the content of the keg.

On his return, the wolf asked what name was put on the child at the baptism. Unhesitatingly, the fox replied *Fo Bhial,* which name in English means ' under the mouth.'

On the morrow the fox again was abroad betimes. He told his partner that he had another invitation to a baptism. And off again went he to the keg of butter. As a result of his second visit to the keg, he calculated that he had consumed about half its content.

" Well," said the wolf to the fox, when the latter came back a second time, " what name did they put on the child? "

" Queer is the name—so queer, in truth, that I myself would not be giving it to a child of mine. The name on the child is *Moolay Moolay"* (*Mu leth*), " which name, being interpreted, signifies ' about half and half.'

On the third morning the russet-dog hastened off to a third alleged baptism. On this occasion he finished the butter, and even licked the inside of the keg. In answer to the wild-dog's question, he replied on his return that the name given at the third baptism was *Buill Imlich,* meaning ' tackling and licking it all up.'

On the fourth day the fox suggested to the wolf that they should unearth the keg of butter they had hidden, and roll it home. So, they set off together; but, on digging up the keg, the wolf could not see a shadow of butter in it.

" Ah! " observed the wolf, who all along had been harbouring suspicions regarding the spate of baptisms— " Ah, it's not yourself that was long in coming to visit the keg of butter! "

And, although the russet-dog strove hard to refute the

charge laid against him, the wild-dog, not believing a word, determined to justify his unbelief by conducting a practical experiment on his sly partner. When they reached their den again, the wolf seized the fox and slung him up by his hind legs, with his head dangling below him. While the fox was suspended in this fashion, a lump of butter commenced to accumulate on his chin—*Fo Bhial*—under the mouth.

" Thou red thief ! " exclaimed the wolf, " I said before that thou hadst visited the keg and devoured the butter ! "

The russet-dog and the wild-dog were not on the best of terms when, at the close of that day, they retired to rest. In the morning the fox, regretting that he and his companion were spending their time in so great an excess of sloth, suggested that they should travel together to such and such a town-land, and begin to cultivate a piece of ground on it. On reaching the town-land, they lost no time in arranging a consultation with the landlord, who gave them a strip of land for " seven Saxon pounds." Oats the new tenants sowed the first spring; and in the autumn they reaped a goodly harvest. When they came to divide the increase, the fox asked the wolf whether he would prefer the root or the crop.

" Give me the root," replied the wolf. Wherefore the fox had fine oaten bread all the year, while the wolf had to content himself with fodder of a kind none too palatable.

Potatoes the new tenants sowed the following year; and the potatoes thrived well. Quoth the fox to the wolf at the end of the potato-lifting : " Name thy choice *this* year ! "

" Give me the crop (top), for you will not be taking the twist out of me any more " (*i.e.*, taking a ' rise ' out of him).

Now the innocent wolf did not comprehend that, while the root of a stalk of corn was not to be preferred to the crop, the root of a potato plant was more palatable than the top of it. And it was not until he realised that his share of the potato harvest was the shaws, and the fox's share the potatoes, that he again found the error of his choice.

Howbeit, the wolf sought to compensate himself for his mistake by making occasional raids upon the fox's supply of potatoes. But one day the russet-dog urged the wild-dog

to read the name he had branded on the hoofs of a certain white mare grazing in a neighbouring paddock. Away went the unsuspecting wild-dog; and, as he was searching the hoofs for the name, the white mare kicked him, thus severing his head from his body.

And never again, they say in the Barra Isles, did the luckless wild-dog put trouble on the russet one.

CHAPTER XII

WELL LORE.

THE wells and springs in Celtic Scotland, to which legend and tradition cling, are innumerable. In the following pages, therefore, it has been possible to allude to but a few of these. Up till about the end of the sixteenth century, most of these wells were regarded as sacred; and a glance through ancient kirk-session records reveals the persistence with which fines were imposed upon those who were adjudged guilty of having desecrated any of them. In the seventeenth century, however, severe restrictions were placed on well-worship. In 1638 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland formally discredited all superstitions associated with wells, and joined in a vigorous campaign to stamp out well-worship, which it now regarded as an idolatrous observance of the worst kind. Despite this, less than twenty years later the Presbytery of Dingwall found it necessary to issue stern orders against the practice of visiting wells in Wester Ross for the purpose of consulting their waters. Indeed, belief in the power of holy water was so persistent at this time that the Privy Council found itself constrained to select commissioners to " wait at Christ's Well in Menteith on the first day of May, and to seize all who might assemble at the spring and imprison them in Doune Castle."

Among those, upon whom the General Assembly poured excessive scorn, were persons " found superstitiously to have passed in pilgrimage to Christ's Well on the Sundays of May to seek their health, that they shall repent in sacco (sackcloth) and linen three several Sabbaths, and pay twenty lib. (Pounds Scots) *toties quoties* for ilk fault."

Well of the Seven Heads, Loch Oich. [*See P.* 152

[*Facing P.* 144

Castle of Kilchurn and a glimpse of Loch Awe.

[*Facing P.* 145

'The Well that Sallied from One Place to Another.'

On the green Island of Islay there is a well that, according to tradition, was brought there from Colonsay by Donald, Lord of the Isles, when he removed his seat to Finlaggan, in Islay. This may be the well referred to by Martin Martin in his inimitable *Description of the Western Isles of Scotland,* and in the following passage: "A mile on the south-west side of the cave named Vah Vearnag is the celebrated well called Tonbir in Knahar, which in the ancient language is as much as to say, 'the well that sallied from one place to another'; for it is a received tradition among the vulgar inhabitants of this isle, and the opposite isle of Colonsay, that this well was the first in Colonsay, until an imprudent woman happened to wash her hands in it, and that, immediately after, the well, being thus abused, came in an instant to Isla, where it is to continue, and is ever since esteemed a catholicon for diseases by the natives and adjacent islanders; and the great resort to it is commonly every quarter day."

Among the other wells reputed to have flitted from one place to another was one that formerly was located at Leys, near Inverness. This well, on being desecrated, betook itself to Keppoch. Another which issued from a hill near Fochabers, in Moray, suffered an indignity at the hands of an evil person, and in consequence removed to the base of a precipitous ravine where, on the following day, it was discovered.

And there is still related in Strath Dearn the tale of an old and lonely man, who for years had declined the warm invitation of relatives to spend the remainder of his days with them on the Canadian prairies. His reluctance at leaving the Old Country was due to his affection for the well that had sustained him so amply all the days of his life.

Eventually, however, he was persuaded to leave for Canada. When he arrived at his destination in the New Country, he was amazed at finding his faithful well bubbling forth beside his new home. Furthermore, close at hand was the large, white stone that in Scotland had stood by

the well, and upon which the old man used to sit when reading his Bible in the open!

Colonsay and the adjoining Isle of Oronsay had several sacred wells. On the north-east of Kiloran Bay is the sacred Well of St. Columba, at which offerings were made from very early times. Beside it is a silver drinking-cup, presented by a lady about the year, 1906. The well is covered over; and within living memory there lay on its lintel stone a collection of silver and copper coins, together with an assortment of buttons removed, no doubt, from the garments of those visiting the well, and believing in the old superstition that it was unlucky to go away without leaving something by way of a votive offering.

Then, at Scalasaig is the Well of the South Wind, to which seamen and fishermen used to resort to leave some offering, and incidentally pray for a south wind. To-day it is not easy to locate; but many of the islanders are as insistent as ever that the petitions of those who came thither were answered.

Wells for Wind-Seekers.

In several of the Western Islands it was customary to resort to the well in order that favourable winds might be sent either to enable fishermen to reach the fishing-grounds, or to ensure the safe arrival of relatives coming by sea. On the Isle of Gigha there is such a well. To it the MacNeils used to go when their galleys were wind-bound; and by stirring the water with a cane a favourable wind arose and conducted them whither they wished to sail. This particular well was called the *Tobar Mòr,* the Great Well. It was covered over with a flat stone, because the natives feared that one day it might flood the island. The captains of foreign vessels wind-bound in these waters used to give the natives a piece of money, in order that they might be permitted to consult the oracle as to the airt of the wind; and we read that all strangers were accustomed to leave at the well a coin or a pin as an oblation.

The Wells of Skye.

In a large island like Skye there are scores of wells, many of which have their own legendry. On the ancient beliefs connected with the wells of the Island of Skye alone a whole volume might be written.

When Martin Martin visited Loch Siant, in Skye, he found that the most celebrated well in the island was believed by the natives to be a specific against all distempers. The inhabitants, he tells us, obliged themselves by a vow to go to the well, and "make the ordinary tour round it, called dessil, which is performed thus: They move thrice round the well, proceeding sunways from east to west, and so on. This is done after drinking of the water; and when one goes away from the well, it is a never-failing custom to leave some small offering on the stone which covers the well."

Pilgrimages to this well were made till within comparatively recent times. After a little ceremony had been observed, an offering was left for the Spirit of the Well. A neighbouring loch and stream abounded with trout and salmon; but no one would touch them, since they regarded them as sacred fishes.

Well of the Trout.

Near by was another well esteemed by the people of Skye because its water was reputed to remove all diseases instantly. The water of this well was considered to be the lightest and "wholesomest" in all the Island. We are told that in time of war and scarcity the inhabitants were able to subsist for many weeks by drinking the water of this well along with fronds of dulse.

Then, in the south of Skye is the sacred well called by a Gaelic name meaning the Well of the Trout. Centuries ago it contained a solitary trout, which the islanders were exceedingly careful not to injure in any way. Though they often caught the trout in their pails by mistake, they never failed to replace it with extreme care.

Up from Glen Elg there is a well called *Tobar Bhan,* or the White Well, from which a burn flows. In olden times

the natives used to go to this well to be cured of their ailments. Near the well they gathered water-cress, and also the herb called "flower of the three mountains," for medicinal purposes. In this well there was once a sacred trout.

At Bernera, in Glen Elg, there is another well that likewise had a trout in it. An old woman, Anne MacRae to name, used to clean this White Well periodically, and sprinkle its approaches with gravel from the shore, so as to keep it pure, and at the same time ensure the wellbeing of the sacred trout. Anne had a great idea of the trout. But I was told in Glen Elg recently that the well contains no trout now, and that is disappeared about thirty-three years ago with the death of Anne, its custodian.

Among the trees down by the Parish Church of Glen Elg, there is a sacred well, known by a Gaelic name denoting the Well of Wine. It is three-cornered, representing the Trinity, as do so many ancient wells.

The Wells of St. Kilda.

Among the wells and springs of St. Kilda, all of which deserve to be noted for their excellent water, is *Tobar nam Buaidh,* the Well of Virtues. This is the *Tou-bir-nimbcuy* of Martin, who writes of it as the finest of "the excellent fountains or springs" in which St. Kilda abounds. The water of this well was considered efficacious against all manner of ailments. Referring to it in 1746, the Rev. Kenneth MacAulay notes that "the water here was a sovereign cure for a great variety of distempers, deafness particularly, and every nervous disease."

The Well of Virtues lies by the shieling in the Great Glen. On an altar hard by it, the islanders, who came to drink of it, were wont to leave offerings. So famed are its waters that for years the more nimble tourists, landing on St. Kilda from the *Hebrides* or the *Dunara Castle,* have dashed straight over the col between the Mullach Sgar and the Mullach Geal to drink of them during the few hours that either of these sister-ships may have been lying at anchor in Village Bay.

When in olden times the natives were delayed by contrary winds, they used to resort to *Tobar na Cille,* sometimes called the Well of St. Brendan. It is said that the direction of the wind altered in their favour when each man about to put out to sea stood astride the waters of this well for a few seconds.

The Lost Well of Youth is believed to have been on the slopes of Conachair. An agèd St. Kildan is said to have discovered this well while carrying a sheep to the fold. Immediately he drank of its water, his decrepitude left him, and his youth returned. Surprised at finding water where formerly none ever had been seen, he laid down the sheep to mark the spot, and then hastened off to the village to inform the inhabitants. The villagers set out with him in great excitement. On arriving at the spot where he had left the sheep, they found no sign either of the well or of the sheep. And ever since that day the St. Kildans from time to time have referred to what they then named the Lost Well of Youth.

And they say that, had he placed a fragment of iron by the well, ere he left the sheep by it—a nail or tacket, or even an old fishing-hook—the Little Folks would not have been able to reclaim the well that had the power of restoring youth and vigour.

It is held that the water of yet another well on St. Kilda " will wash linen without soap as well as other water will with it."

The Well called Fivepennies.

The most celebrated well in Jura was noted for the fact that its water was lighter by one-half than any other water in the island, with the result that one could consume large quantities of it without feeling the least uncomfortable. It was, moreover, a certain preventive against sea-sickness to whomsoever drank of it.

There are two wells in Eigg, which were reputed to be efficacious against ailments. Martin speaks of one called Fivepennies, which, he says, never failed to cure the natives. If a stranger should lie at this well during the night, he

woke up with some deformity in the morning. But the inhabitants were immune to such deformities, even if they should have lain there for several nights. The other well on Eigg is called St. Catherine's Well. It is situated at the opposite end of the island, and was believed to be a catholicon for all diseases.

A well near to the village of Borve, in Harris, was long held to be efficacious in cases of loss of appetite. Even if one had eaten but an hour previously, a sip of water from this well readily restored the appetite alike of the native and the stranger.

The Wells of Lewis.

Near the Butt of Lewis is a well, the water of which was considered a remedy for insanity. Patients going there to be cured were first of all required to walk seven times round the Temple of St. Molochus, the ruins of which stand a few yards away. It was called *Teampull Mòr* in Gaelic, meaning the Great Temple. But this name must have referred only to its holiness, because the place was very small. Having journeyed round seven times, he who sought relief from madness was besprinkled with water, which was conveyed in a little jar from St. Ronan's Well. This jar was entrusted to the hereditary custody of a family whose early ancestors were designated 'the clark of the temple.' After the patient had been sprinkled with water, he was laid on the site of the altar, where, if he slept soundly, he was bound to recover from his malady. St. Andrew's Well, in Lewis, was also consulted in cases of illness. From it a tub of water was borne to the bed-side of a sick person. Then a plate or a saucer was placed gently on the surface of the water. If this moved round sun-wise, the invalid was sure to recover; and, conversely, if it sank or moved round the other way, nothing but death could be expected.

In a churchyard close to the shore of Loch Torridon there is a well wherein for hundreds of years "three stones have been perpetually whirled round and round." By conveying one of these stones in a pail of water to a person afflicted with any kind of illness, a cure was effected whenever the

patient placed his hand in the pail and touched the stone. But, alas! one fine day an old woman tried to cure her goat in this way; and, when she replaced the stone in the well, it no longer whirled, but sank to the bottom. Its virtue had vanished; and it has remained motionless ever since.

The Wells of Barra.

Near Loch St. Clair is a well which the natives of Barra call *Tobar Chaluim Chille,* believing it to be the spring frequented by St. Columba. "And they were saying that St. Columba left a kind of spell on that well," a native of Barra informed me some years ago. Generations of East Coast fishermen have been in the habit of calling this well St. Clair's Well. In olden times the fishermen of Barra used to drink of its water on Sundays, in the hope of getting heavy shots of herring during the week; and in pre-Reformation days, when the Church of St. Barr, at Eoligarry, was the only place of public worship in the Isle of Barra, the Islesfolk, sailing over from Vatersay and the other Barra Isles, used to slake their thirst at this well on the way to divine service.

Some there are who say that, before proceeding to church, the women-folk of these Islands were accustomed to tidy their hair when gazing at their reflections in the clear water of St. Clair's Well. We may take it that at this time mirrors were not included among the toilet requisites in vogue throughout the Barra Isles.

According to an ancient chronicler, "there is one springand fresh water Well. And the inhabitants and ancient men and woemen both men and woemen in this toune (Kilbar, in the north of Barra) and of the Countrie especiallie one ancient man being of fyve or sexscoir zeares old doth say that when appearance of Warrs wer to be in the Countrey of Barray That certaine drops of blood hath oftymes bein sein in this springand fresh Water Well." The chronicler emphasises the fact that, in addition to the testimony of the older inhabitants, he had this information corroborated by Rory MacNeil, the Chief of Barra at that time. Rory went a step further in alleging that, indicative

of the coming of peace, " certaine little bitts of Peitts wold be sein " in the well. But, then, we must take into account that at this time Rory MacNeil was " ane verie ancient man of sexscoir yeares old or therby," and that the most insistent informant was " fyve or sexscoir zeares."

The most famous well in Barra, of course, is that associated with the cockles of the Great Cockle Shore, in the north of the island. This is the well referred to by Martin as the Well of Kilbar, which, he writes, " throws up embryoes of cockles, but I could not discern any in the rivulet, the air being at the time foggy."

Well of the Head.

In that part of the Isle of Skye known as Strath there is a well known as *Tobar a' Chinn,* Well of the Head. It was here that a certain Lauchlan MacKinnon avenged himself on Donnachadh Mòr by beheading him and washing his head in this well. Donnachadh Mòr was ground-officer to MacKinnon of Strath. In the course of his rounds he exacted from a poor widow the oppressive death-duty called the *each-ursainn.* In tribal days it was the custom in the Highlands for the laird's factor to remove from the relatives of a deceased tenant their best horse or cow. On this occasion the widow resisted Donnachadh's claim; but he ill-used her, and took the horse from her by force. Now, Lauchlan MacKinnon had learnt as a youngster from his own mother that, when she became a widow, she had suffered similar treatment at the hands of the same factor. For years, therefore, he waited for an opportunity of paying off this old score against Donnachadh; and here, he decided, was the opportunity. He engaged the factor, killed him, decapitated him, and washed his head in the Well of the Head. And it is said in Skye that thereafter no factor dared exact the ancient death-duty known as the *each-ursainn.*

This recalls the story connected with the famous well by the roadside at Loch Oich, and known as the Well of the Seven Heads. But this story is more a matter of history than of folk-tale. Over this well there stands a tall

monument; and carved in stone on the four sides is a long inscription in English, Gaelic, French, and Latin. In this wise runs the English inscription: "As a memorial of the example and summary vengeance which, in the swift course of feudal justice, inflicted by the order of Lord McDonell and Aross, overtook the perpetrators of the foul murder of the Keppoch Family, a branch of the powerful and illustrious clan of which his lordship was the chief. This monument is erected by Colonel McDonell of Glengarry, XVII Mac-Mhic-Alaister, his successor and representative, in the year of Our Lord 1812. The heads of the Seven Murderers were presented at the feet of the noble Chief in Glengarry Castle after having been washed in this spring; and ever since that event, which took place in the sixteenth century, it has been known by the name of *Tobar-nan-Ceann* or the Well of the Heads."

In my recent book, *Somewhere in Scotland,* I have given a lengthy account of the circumstances leading up to, and culminating in, the washing of the seven heads in the well by the roadside at Loch Oich; and so I need not repeat myself here. The best account of which I know, however, will be found in David MacKay's *Clan Warfare in the Scottish Highlands.*

The Springs that made Loch Awe.

From mythological times there has been handed down to us the folk-tale of how Loch Awe came into existence. According to this tale, that dreaded female demon, the Cailleach Bheur, whose exploits are recorded in the folk-lore of several countries, had occasion to pass through the valley now occupied by Loch Awe, when, as if by evil design, her foot struck an obstacle. Thus released, it is believed, were the subterranean springs that now welled up to fill the valley with a loch.

According to the Ossianic version of this folk-tale, a wise man, who lay dying, sent for his fair daughter, Bera, and bequeathed to her as the last of her race all the fertile farm-lands now submerged beneath the waters of Loch Awe. Only one condition did he attach to the bequest—namely,

that every evening at sundown Bera should ascend to a spring on the summit of Ben Cruachan, and on the mouth of that spring place a sacred stone, so as to prevent its waters from flowing down to cover the face of the valley.

Bera regularly fulfilled her father's instructions after his death. But one day, weary with hunting the corries of Cruachan, she fell asleep on the sunny hillside. Not until the third morning did she awaken; and by that time her heritage lay beneath the waters of the loch that since then has been known as Loch Awe.

And this recalls the next folk-tale.

A Well that Submerged a Castle.

The Norwegian legend of the Folge-Fiord, which is said to cover the seven districts overwhelmed by snow and ice for their wickedness, is regarded as having a parallel in Sutherland, where a well within a castle rose and swamped the entire inhabitants because of the waywardness of its owner.

Somewhere in Sutherland there stood the stronghold of an evil man; and in the centre of that stronghold there was a well that unfailingly supplied him and his soldiers with water, and was of inestimable value when they were beleaguered. One night it was observed that the well was rising rapidly. As the stronghold stood in a hollow place, there were no means of disposing of this overflow. All next day the water continued to rise, inundating the first storey of the stronghold. And by the third day the entire edifice lay submerged, and a deep lake took the place occupied so recently by the evil man and his bodyguard.

On clear, still days a gable and a chimney or two may be seen far beneath the water's surface. And the story is told in Sutherland of a fishing-tenant, who in recent years was fishing on this lake, when a mannikin stepped out from among the reeds by the shore, and said to him: "You must fish here no more, for there are more mouths in this lake than there are fish to feed them!"

Having delivered himself thus, the mannikin disappeared

among the reeds. For all this, the fishing-tenant did not desist. But he frequently confessed that every time a breath of wind brought a rustle to the reeds thereafter, he became apprehensive lest again the mannikin should make his appearance.

The Apparition at the Well.

And here is a story relating to a tiny place in Perthshire known as Auchloa, located near the bridge crossing the Lyon at Comrie Castle.

There is a cottage up there; and in this cottage an old man lay dying, attended in his last moments by two or three women of the family. In his dying, he kept on crying out for water; but, whenever they gave him of the water that was in the house, he refused it, and strove to push it away from him. What he wanted, he explained, was water from a certain well in the neighbourhood. To pacify him, one of the women intimated that she would go to this well for some of its water. A neighbour said that she would accompany her; and the two women duly picked up their stoups, and set off. They had some distance to travel to this well. Consequently, the gloaming was upon them by the time they reached it.

Steps led down to the well; and, as they were descending these steps, the leading woman saw in front of her the apparition of the old man whom they had left in the cottage. The apparition was clad in a night-shirt; and from the waist downward it was wrapped in a grey blanket. From its cupped hands it was sipping water from the well. The leading woman uttered a suppressed scream. But not until her escort put out a hand to touch her shoulder did she also see the apparition.

Instantly the women dropped their stoups, and hastened for the cottage. The old man was just breathing his last as they entered.

On the day of the funeral, the neighbouring woman went to the house of the dead to assist in tidying things up, and in getting the place in readiness for the final observances. In the bottom drawer of the great chest, that stood in the

room where the old man now lay dead, she found a grey blanket identical with the one worn by the phantom at the well. Not until that moment were the occupants of the house aware that there was such a thing in the house as a grey blanket!

CHAPTER XIII

BELL LORE

RECORDS of sacred bells are scanty. But it is well known that in certain parts of Scotland there existed bells, to which were ascribed healing and protecting properties, such as were possessed by the water of certain wells and springs. The general belief was that such bells, when stolen or otherwise removed from their rightful place, had the power of returning of their own accord. The same power was said to be vested in a wonderful *bachall* or crosier belonging to the godly St. Moluag. This crosier was entrusted to a hereditary custodian who, in respect of his services as keeper, was endowed with a freehold in the Trotternish region of Skye.

St. Moluag's crosier had the power of healing whomsoever touched it, or was touched by it. When the saint died, in the latter half of the seventh century, one of his apostles took the crosier with him from Lismore to Appin, whither he had journeyed to minister to a dying man. In his haste to re-cross to Lismore, so as to avoid an impending storm, he arrived back without St. Moluag's magic crosier; but, just as he was about to step on the threshold of the church, something whizzed past his ear. What was this but the *bachall* returning of its own accord to the proper place in the church! In common with many small bells that, on account of their healing powers, were used either privately or in churches, this crosier had the miraculous power of finding its way back in the event of its being stolen or forgotten. The touch of a *bachall* and the sound of such a bell were held, alike, to heal afflicted persons by dispelling the evil spirits of which they were possessed. St. Moluag's crosier wrought many cures

in northern Skye. Hence the little hamlet of Kilmoluag was consecrated to the Saint's memory.

The Bell of Insh.

On a high, wooded promontory overlooking Loch Insh, near Kincraig, stands the Church of Insh, occupying the ancient site of the Chapel of the Swans. Resting in an old stone cup, sunk into a window-sill inside the Church itself, is the famous Bell of Insh. Like so many other Celtic bells, this bell possessed certain magical properties. At will it could fly through the air to the aid of those who sought its protection or its healing powers; and not infrequently did it find its way from Insh to Scone in the days when the Scottish Kings were crowned there.

The Bell of Insh sang sweetly in its travelling; and it is said that in olden times the Highland folks often knew of its destination when they heard it singing past them through the countryside.

In addition to its powers of flight, healing, and music, it also possessed the instinct of the homing pigeon. And so, when those who sought its aid tried to delay or prevent its return to Insh, after it had completed its ministrations, it simply flew home again.

To-day the bell remains chained and padlocked in the Church of Insh. And they say in Badenoch that ill-luck overtakes anyone who has the temerity to touch its iron tongue.

In the late autumn of 1936, I visited Kincraig for the express purpose of seeing this bell. I found those responsible for the care of the Church of Insh so jealous for the bell's safety that only after I had established my identity beyond doubt was I permitted to have the key of the church. I photographed the bell; and, when reporting in the village that I had duly locked the door again and left things precisely as I had found them, I learnt that furtive visitors had chipped the rim of the bell, and taken away fragments of it as souvenirs. So this is why, to-day, the Badenoch folks do not permit all and sundry to enter the Church of Insh without an escort.

* * * * *

The Yellow Bell of St. Modan.

Similar powers were vested in the Yellow Bell of St. Modan, at Ardchattan, in Argyll. This bell also could travel through the air, heal the sick, sing sonorously in its journeyings, and always find its way home again. On more than one occasion its services were sought by ailing folks in Scone. But on its last mission disaster befell it on its homeward journey. It wandered into " some forgotten mere among the tumbled fragments of the hills," and was lost forever. As late as the nineteenth century there lived among the wilds of Argyll folks who deponed to having heard the sweet music of the Yellow Bell of St. Modan, as it went flying over the hills and sea-creeks.

The Bell of Inchtavannach.

For many years Inchtavannach, one of the largest and most picturesque of the isles of Loch Lomond, was the island-home of St. Kessog. The name, Inchtavannach, is a corruption of the Gaelic, *Innis Tigh a' Mhanaich,* meaning Isle of the Monk's Abode. On this Isle there is a steep hill-top marked on the Ordnance Survey Map as Tom na Clog (*Tom a' Chluig*), Hill of the Bell; and there rested on this hill-top until early in the nineteenth century the bell known as St. Kessog's Bell. This bell was of bronze. It is said that, when it was rung, it summoned to worship all the natives of the three parishes of Luss, Kilmaronock, and Inch Cailleach. The last named parish is now called Buchanan; and a very beautiful and interesting parish it is!

The inhabitants of Scotland must have possessed exceedingly good hearing in those days, since the bell is so small. Indeed, it is doubtful whether to-day any one living could hear it in the distant parish of Kilmaronock. The writer of an article dealing, among other things, with this bell in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* (1927-28) questions whether it would be audible even at the eastern side of Loch Lomond.

Except for its magical power of sending its chimes out over great distances, there is little else of interest about St. Kessog's Bell. The last we hear of it is that it was

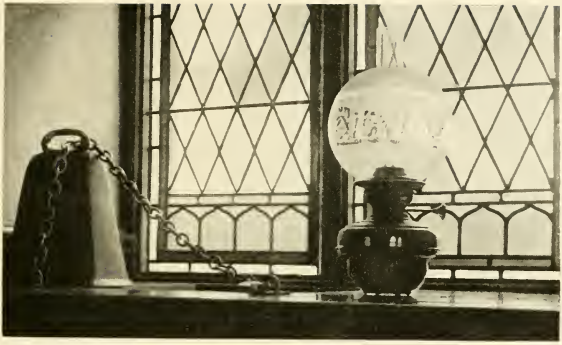
removed from Inch Cailleach and attached to, or placed upon, a memorial erected in the shallows near the western shore of Loch Lomond, opposite Inchtavannach. Later it disappeared; and its whereabouts to-day no one knows. Unlike other bells of its kind, it seems to have lacked the faculty of being able to find its way back to its wonted place.

St. Finnan's Bell.

Between Acharacle and Glen Finnan stretches the picturesque loch known as Loch Shiel, at the head of which stands the tall monument erected by Alexander MacDonald of Glenaladale to commemorate, *inter alia*, the raising of the Jacobite Standard at this spot in the autumn of 1745. In Loch Shiel there are many islets; and among these islets is *Eilean Fhionain*, St. Finnan's Isle (sometimes referred to as the Green Isle of Loch Shiel), which lies some five miles up the loch from the Acharacle end. This grassy isle in ancient times was a sacred retreat; and in times more modern it continued to be the place of burial of the Clan Ranald. Upon it stands the ruins of a place of worship. These ruins, though they exhibit no architectural distinction such as would justify one in ascribing to them an ancient origin, are said to occupy the site of the hermit cell believed to have been built by St. Finnan himself, away back in the seventh century. St. Finnan, as you are aware, was contemporaneous with St. Columba.

St. Finnan's Isle is still used as a burial-place. Here Roman Catholics and Protestants lie interred on opposite sides of the site of St. Finnan's cell, both factions claiming alike the protection of St. Finnan.

The altar of the chapel on this isle is still preserved; and on this altar for nearly three centuries has rested St. Finnan's Bell, one of the few ancient, bronze bells still in existence in Scotland, and called after a saint. The bell rings of old, half-remembered things; and there is a tradition firmly established in Moidart and Morar that a curse will assuredly fall on anyone removing it, and that this curse will be transmitted through generations of the descendants of the person so doing.



The Bell of Insh. [*See P.* 158

By the shores of Loch Lomond, near Rowardennan, where in olden times were heard the chimes of St. Kessog's Bell.

[*Facing P.* 160

Loch Fyne in Winter. Among the dark pines on the opposite shore lies Ardkinglas.

The Gravel-cart, Inveraray.

[*Facing P.* 161

While Prince Charlie's enemies were in pursuit of him, they searched the green Isle in Loch Shiel. One of the pursuers, having regarded the bell as a fine piece of loot, picked it up. But, they say in Moidart, the bell began to screech so weirdly that he straightway dropped it and fled.

Since that day no one has attempted to remove St. Finnan's Bell.

Prince Charlie's Silver Bell.

There is a tradition still current around Aberfoyle that, when Prince Charlie was making for a farm at a place called Malling, near the Lake of Menteith, he came to a burn by the Old Manse of Aberfoyle known as the Pow, into which he flung a silver bell. Stories of this sunken treasure became so prevalent in Scotland in later years that a party of students from Glasgow set out for Aberfoyle in an endeavour to recover this bell. No sooner had they diverted the water just above that part of the burn in which the bell was supposed to lie than they got a glimpse of it. But suddenly a terrific cloud-burst descended upon the land, and brought such torrents to the watershed of the Pow that they were precluded from ever recovering the silver bell.

St. Drostan's Bell.

St. Finnan is not the only Scottish saint to have a bell named after him. At the Episcopal Chapel in Old Deer (Aberdeen-shire) is a bell dedicated "To God and St. Drostan, Abbot and Confessor, 1851."

Engraved upon this bell is an inscription in Latin, of which the following is a translation:—"Funerals I toll: Lightnings I break: Sabbaths I proclaim: the Slothful I rouse: the Winds I scatter: the Cruel I appease."

St. Drostan is said to be the Patron Saint of Glen Urquhart, where a farm still goes by the old name of St. Drostan's Croft.

The Bell of Kirkmichael.

Also located in Glen Urquhart is the site of the ancient Celtic *cill* or Chapel of Kirkmichael, the history of which

now lies buried in the clods. An Inverness correspondent writes me that, somewhere about the year, 1869, a house was erected on the site of this Chapel for her father, who at the time was medical practitioner for the district. The bell of the chapel, it is said, used to hang on a large tree still standing on a slight eminence close to the entrance gate; and this tree is known traditionally as the Bell Tree. My informant tells me, further, that round this tree she and her companions, when children, habitually played tig, despite the continued efforts of the servants to scare them away from it on the pretext that it was ghost-haunted.

Merchard's Bells.

And now we come to Merchard's bells, which are associated with the Great Glen of Scotland. Merchard, or Ychard, as he sometimes is referred to, appears in the Scottish Kalendars; and, according to traditions still current in Glen Moriston, he was a southern Pict—a native of Kincardine O'Neill. He was the patron saint of Glen Moriston.

The story is recited in Strathglas of how the attention of Merchard and two of his companions was attracted to a white cow which, day after day, stood gazing at a certain tree, without ever eating, and yet went home to the byre each evening with her udder as well filled with milk as were the udders of the rest of the herd.

Moved eventually by curiosity he no longer could control, Merchard began to excavate at the base of the tree in question. There he found three bells, as bright and fresh as on the day they left the founder's hands. To each of his companions Merchard gave a bell: the third bell he retained for himself. And it was agreed there and then that, on the spot where any of the three bells rang a third time of its own accord, a place of worship must be erected.

In this wise it came about that one of Merchard's companions founded a church at Glen Convinth, in the Aird district of Inverness-shire. Church, bell, and burying-place were consecrated duly.

With this particular bell are associated many legends,

although the scene of its mystical behaviour is shifted sometimes to Glen Moriston.

Now, a certain man dwelling in Strathglas stole this bell from the church, and suspended it from a tree near his home. At dead of night it commenced to ring inconsolably. But the man who had tampered with it had not the courage to rise and investigate matters.

Invested with powers similar to those possessed by the Bell of Insh, this bell was found in the morning to have quitted the tree for its rightful place in the western end of the church.

When this bell chimed of its own accord, it was regarded in the neighbourhood as a forewarning of death. And there is a tradition still current in Inverness-shire that, when, in 1745, a contingent of Lord Louden's men came to learn of the veneration in which the natives held it, they deliberately extracted its tongue or 'clapper.' And I am assured on local authority that some years later the tongueless bell was seen in a corner of the churchyard.

On the approach of a funeral, the bell which Merchard had retained for himself sang out the Gaelic words, *Dhachaidh! dhachaidh! gu do leapa bhuan!* Home! home! to thy last resting-place!

The people of Glen Moriston also believe that this bell, when placed in water, would not sink, but would float on the surface; but, for all that, everyone was loth to put it to this test. It is said, however, that the final disappearance of the bell may have resulted from someone's having experimented with it in the River Moriston, though the belief more prevalent in the Great Glen to this day is that some stranger to the district stole it.

The Bell of Cumine.

Another bell associated with the Great Glen is the Bell of Cumine. From 657 until 669 Cumine, who was the seventh Abbot of Iona, presided over that island settlement. He founded Cill-Chuimein, the site of which is now incorporated in Fort Augustus. His bell was known as the Buyen, or Bouach (*Am Buadhach*), signifying the Victorious, the Virtuous, or 'the-full-of-virtue.'

According to the Wardlaw MS., Cumine's bell was preserved at Cill-Chuimein as late as 1559. In that year the Tutor of Lovat, when returning by boat from Cill-Chuimein to his own country, in company with two ladies, Jean Campbell and Janet Ross, carried away the bell in the boat, as they sailed down Loch Ness. "The bell of Cill-Chuimein, called the Buyen or Bouach, is put aboard their boat to be carried over to Conventh or Corridon, whither at the ladies' desire or not who knows, but it is certainly rumord that a cruell tempest arose and blew uppon the loch, so as they could neither row nor saile, and, lick to be sunke or set, one of the number desired to throw over the bell in the loch, and so a sudden calm ensues. Whither they turned back with the bell to set it ashore quher they found it, or if it was cast in the loch, I got no certainty, or whither the lady desired to put it in the loch, I'm as uncertain, but it is a tradition that ever since the water, or (as the vulgar call it) the wine of Loch Ness is medicinall, and beasts carried to it, or the water of the lake brought to beasts to drink, which I have often seen, and asked the reson, which was told me as aforsaid."

St. Fillan's Bell.

When St. Fillan died, his successor, an Abbot of Strathfillan, in Perthshire, bequeathed to his servants and to their descendants in perpetuity certain relics that had belonged to the saint. The hereditary custodians of these relics went by the good Highland name of Dewar, a name derived from the Gaelic word meaning a stranger or wanderer, since those who bore this name were entrusted with the task of wandering over the country in search of cattle stolen by rievers, and by clans at enmity with one another. The Dewars, in their search, were 'sianed' or protected by the veneration in which even their enemies held the relics of St. Fillan; and, by reason of their custodianship of the same, they possessed in Breadalbain no fewer than six crofts, on which they lived rent-free. In the days of Robert the Bruce, and probably up to the time of the Reformation, the relics consisted of St. Fillan's crozier, the bones of his

left arm, and his bell. Some fifty years or so ago, the crozier was found in Canada, in the possession of a Dewar. To-day this crozier, which was known in olden times as the *cogerach*, is to be seen in the National Museum of Antiquities, at Edinburgh. When a Dewar set out to recover stolen livestock, he bore the *cogerach* in his hand; and there is a tradition that never in all his quests throughout Scotland did the bearer of the *cogerach* have occasion to resort to force—so disarming was the influence of this relic upon those who had driven off their countrymen's cattle.

Now, about the time of the Union of the Parliaments, St. Fillan's Bell was stolen from the kirkyard of Strathfillan by a young Englishman wandering among the historical haunts of Scotland. Later, however, the descendants of this young man restored it, with the result that it, also, is now on view in the same museum as that containing St. Fillan's crozier. St. Fillan's Bell shared with so many other bells the power of finding its way back to its rightful place, when removed either purposely or inadvertently. " That which belongs not to you, belong not to it ! " the bell is believed to have uttered in angry tones, when flying back through the air to its home in the kirkyard of Strathfillan. But, somehow or other, it failed to return to Strathfillan of its own accord when the young Englishman carried it off to the south of England, where it was discovered quite by accident several years later.

On the morning of the Battle of Bannockburn, the Abbot of Inchaffray carried the silver reliquary containing the bones of St. Fillan's left arm along the ranks of the kneeling Scottish army. At the time of the Reformation this relic was either lost or destroyed.

It is said that St. Fillan died at or near the village of St. Fillan's, at the east end of Loch Earn. The coffin containing his corpse was borne thence by the men of Breadalbain for interment in their own territory. But, when the bearers reached the spot where the tracks to Strathfillan and Killin diverge, they began to quarrel for the possession of the corpse. The Strathfillan men strove to continue the journey in the one direction, and the Killin

men in the other. No sooner were swords and dirks flashing, according to a Perthshire tradition, than coffin and corpse became two coffins and two corpses. So, the contestants immediately sheathed their weapons; and the men of Strathfillan set off by one track with one corpse, and the men of Killin by the other track with the other corpse. The only feasible explanation for this extraordinary occurrence was that put forward by a recent minister of Strathfillan, namely, that the funeral party had had so much drink that its members were seeing double.

CHAPTER XIV

CAVE LORE

ONE of the commonest of all the traditions current in the Western Highlands and Islands is that concerning the disappearance of a piper who bravely marched into a cave, accompanied by his dog, but who never returned. Almost every locality has its own Piper's Cave; and even in localities where there is no cave, the tradition of the unreturning piper is a commonplace, and is recited with local variations of a minor nature. In some parts the cave is referred to as the Cave of Gold. To my own knowledge, there is at least a score of caves thus named, into which marched a piper, playing brawly the while, never to return to tell of what he encountered within. As widely spread as the tradition about the piper is the tradition that, somewhere among the remote Highland hills, there lies a Cave of Gold, so-called because it is believed to contain untold wealth deposited in it long, long ago. But the Cave of Gold is always difficult—if not impossible—to locate!

The Piper's Cave.

There is a cave near Borreraig, on Loch Dunvegan, known as the Piper's Cave. It is associated with the disappearance of one of the famous MacCrimmon pipers, who had their piping-college near at hand. Some say, however, that no piper was ever lost in this cave, but that it was used by the pipers when practising their art.

Concerning the origin of the well-known *MacCrimmon's Lament,* at least two folk-tales are widely circulated. According to one, the MacCrimmon piper, whose tragic

death it was designed to commemorate, was the only casualty in a skirmish in the territory of MacLeod's enemies. It is true, of course, that MacLeod's piper, MacCrimmon to name, was the only casualty at the Rout of Moy. According to the other, the piper is supposed to have entered this cave, accompanied by his faithful dog, when gradually —so the story goes—the skirl of his pipes became fainter and fainter, until eventually it died away. The islanders, it is said, watched the piper enter the cave; and they were greatly perturbed when he did not come back. And long, indeed, did they keep vigil at its mouth; but MacCrimmon returned no more.

Tradition has it, however, that some time afterwards his poor, woebegone dog hirpled out of the cave in a semi-flayed and exhausted condition. But no satisfactory account was ever forthcoming as to the mysterious disappearance of his master. So, the Skye folks came to the conclusion that MacCrimmon had been ' spirited away ' by the faery queen, whose ears he had delighted by the rich strains of his pibrochs. This, at any rate, is the story as I received it a few years ago from the lips of the folks at Dunvegan; and, except so far as the fate of the dog is concerned, it coincides very closely with the Lewis version that I got from a lance-corporal in the Seaforths, who, while we were billeted in a tumble-down barn at Rubrouck, in Flanders, a few days after most of our Gaelic comrades had been killed in a foolish onslaught at Ypres, could only console his troubled spirit by crooning to himself the old, Lewisian version of *MacCrimmon's Lament.*

The cave of Borreraig is not the only one in the Isle of Skye, into which a piper is said to have gone. In the north-west of the parish of Kilmuir, and not far from the promontory known as Bornaskitaig Point, there are three caves. Local legend has it that in one of these—probably in *Uamh nan Oir,* the Cave of Gold—a piper was lost. This legend must date back at least as far as the seventeenth century, since Martin Martin, who supposed the cave to be a mile in length, records that the natives around this place told him of an over-anxious piper who, having resolved to explore its dark passages and to ascertain its correct

dimensions, entered and never came out to give an account of his progress. It is with the disappearance of a MacArthur piper, however, that this cave is associated. The MacArthurs were hereditary pipers to the MacDonalds.

In Barra there is a cave into which, the natives aver, a fearless piper went, and out of which he never came. And the more superstitious folks dwelling on that fascinating Isle warn the stranger and the unwary not to go too close to *Uamh nan Oir*, the Cave of Gold, lest they also be pounced upon by the sea-dogs that are believed to have devoured the unsuspecting piper.

A story almost identical is told of a cave on the western side of the Isle of Colonsay; and the inhabitants of Islay say that long, long ago at the mouth of a cave on *their* island a wretched dog used to sit when the moon was full, and howl a "lament" for his master, who had vanished in a strange manner.

Slain by the Faery Tenant.

There is a Piper's Cave in the neighbourhood of Argyll's Bowling Green; and there is also a cavern in Mull where a piper met his fate. This piper was accompanying a marriage party. Despite the protestations of his companions, he insisted on exploring the cavern's darkest recesses. And they say that, when his comrades realised that he was not returning, they became anxious; and, having entered the cave in search of him, they were all slain by the faery tenant, upon whose private apartment they had trespassed unwittingly. This Mull piper is said to have been one of the MacLaines of Loch Buie.

Somewhere in Kintyre yet another confident piper met a "leddy in a green goon," and lamented that, since he had only two hands, he could not embrace her and play his pipes properly at the same time. This is the incident that may have given rise to the Gaelic lines, of which the following is a fair translation:

> It's sad that I am without three hands—
> Two for the pipes, and one for the claymore.

Cave of Gold.

Accessible to none but the most nimble-footed wanderer are the steeps of Crogary Mòr, in North Uist; and known only to those who are familiar with the ageless rocks forming its summit is the entrance to the Cave of Gold. Hidden away in the secret depths of this cave there is of precious metal, they say, the fill of seven cow-hides. And one day, while staying at the little farm of Ahmhor, in the shadow of Crogary Mòr, I set out in the hope of locating this celebrated cavern. But so engrossed did I become in the prospect to be viewed from the summit of the Crogary, that I omitted to search for the Cave. Stretching away to the south and east, the welter of lochs and lochans was relieved to some extent by the comparatively low peaks of the North Lee and the South Lee, and by the Minch beyond. To the westward, the Monach Isles and the Haskeirs sparkled like gems in a sea of emerald. To the northward lay the Sound of Harris, with its wonderful array of islands of every shape and size—Shillay, Pabbay, Boreray, Lingay, Berneray, Killegray, Ensay, and more than a hundred other. Behind them towered the lofty Mountains of Harris. Small wonder, then, that I was forgetting all about the Cave of Gold!

Cave of the Little Old Woman of the Red Fell.

On Soay Isle, one of the St. Kilda group, is a cave called *Tigh Dugan,* Duncan's House. There used to be a tradition among the St. Kildans that Duncan was the name of one of two rascals who plotted to rid Hirta (the name of the largest island, and the one on which the natives lived) of all its people by setting fire to the village church, during worship. Their design was frustrated by the Little Old Woman of the Red Fell (Ruaival) who, on the arrival of a boat from Scotland, advised the crew of their wicked intent. One of the villains was placed on Stac an Armin, hard by Boreray of St. Kilda, from which he was observed to leap to his death into the sea. The other was imprisoned on

Soay. Many years afterwards his skeleton was found, along with a dirk, in the cavern still bearing his name.

A variation of this tale is that the old woman fled from the village to an earth-cave over at Ruaival, and lived there in seclusion until the factor to MacLeod of MacLeod arrived on his annual visit. When Dugan and his accomplice, Fearchair, ran down toward the boat-run on the approach of the factor's boat, she forestalled them, and told the factor and his crew the true story of their evil intentions. And to this very day the cave occupied by her over at Ruaival is known as *Uamh Caillich Bhig Ruaival,* Cave of the Little Old Woman of the Red Fell. It is now marked as such on the Ordnance Survey Map prepared a few years ago by John Mathieson; and it is situated close to the stream known as the Ruaival River, and the site of the Chapel of St. Brendan.

How MacPhee Escaped from Colonsay.

There is a cave at Urkaig Beag, in Colonsay, of which the following story is told. The last of the MacPhee lairds of Colonsay had been defeated by his enemies, the MacNeils, and took refuge along with his three dogs in this cave, which had an entrance from the sea, and another from the land. At the sea entrance MacPhee placed his three dogs on guard against his enemies, while he himself took up a defensive position in a recess about halfway down the cave, where there was just room enough to enable him to wield his sword. At this point the main cave is so contracted that it is necessary for one to get on all-fours in order to pass through. As MacPhee saw the head of each of his pursuers emerge in turn from the contracted passage, he promptly beheaded him, and dragged his corpse into the cave. When this fate had befallen five or six of his foes, the remainder, unable to obtain any response to their enquiry as to how fared their accomplices, took alarm. After consultation, they agreed to dig down into the cave from above. This, MacPhee realised, would mean his disaster. Meanwhile recognising the tide to have risen sufficiently at the sea entrance to prevent his enemies from gaining ingress

except by swimming, he decided, while their attention was diverted in digging above, to escape by swimming across Kiloran Bay, along with his dogs, a distance of about a mile. He had not completed a bow-shot's length of this arduous undertaking, however, when his foes noticed him, and discharged a flight of arrows at him, one of which pierced his hip. MacPhee now made for a rock lying a little ahead, landed thereon, and extracted the arrow. Since that day the rock has been known by a Gaelic name meaning the Black Skerry of MacPhee.

Thereafter MacPhee and his dogs completed their swim across Kiloran Bay. They then wandered along the shore until they came to Baile na h-Airde. There MacPhee found a coble with a plank stove in, lying amongst iris-flags above high-water mark. Cutting a sward with his knife, he plugged the leak, and launched the coble. And, taking his dogs aboard with him, he rowed across to Jura. In this wise he escaped from the cave on Colonsay that to this day is known as MacPhee's Cave.

Cave of the MacIans.

There is a folk-tale current in Ardnamurchan that recalls the manner in which the MacLeods of Skye suffocated the MacDonalds, who had taken refuge in the Cave of St. Frances, on the Island of Eigg. Tradition has it that the whereabouts of the MacDonalds were disclosed by the foot-prints of one of their number who, believing the enemy to be out of sight, came out of the cave to reconnoitre, and left his marks upon the snow, thus enabling the enemy to trace him and his clansmen to their hiding-place.

By the rocky shore of Ardnamurchan there is a cave known as the cave of the MacIans. At the time of the story, Ardnamurchan belonged to a sept of the MacDonalds called the MacIans of Ardnamurchan. Now, about the year, 1624, the Campbells invaded Ardnamurchan, seized the MacIan stronghold of Mingary, garrisoned it, and drove the MacIans into hiding among the wilds of their patrimony. Some of the fugitives sought refuge in this cave. Here

they might have remained undetected for a time, had not one of them, weary of his confinement in the dark cavern, come out into the open, and left his footprints in the previous night's fall of snow. It is said that the fugitive, on realising the jeopardy into which he carelessly had thrown himself and his clans-people, endeavoured to cover up his tracks by retreating backwards toward the cave; but how it was imagined this would deceive anyone, no one can explain. In any case, one of the Clan Campbell had observed him, and had hurried off to Mingary Castle, which was now in the possession of his kinsmen. Forthwith a detachment of Campbells reconnoitred the footprints, and traced them to the cave, wherein were huddled several of the MacIans. At the mouth of the cave they kindled a great fire, and thus suffocated its occupants to death. If this incident be true, as well it may be, it occurred just half a century after the somewhat similar incident on the Island of Eigg, when the MacLeods entrapped the MacDonalds in the Cave of St. Frances, and at the entrance to that cave maintained a fire " with unrelenting assiduity," to use Sir Walter Scott's words.

The Great House of Alba.

Charlemange and Barbarossa and King Sebastian of Portugal are by no means the only persons believed to be in a long, deep sleep, and for whose awakening the world is awaiting. Many of the giants of Celtic Scotland are said to be far from dead. They are merely asleep in the Great House of Alba.

Once upon a time an intrepid Highlander entered a large cave, on the floor of which he found a number of mighty men, fast asleep. In the centre of the cave stood a stone table, upon which lay a huge bugle. This bugle the Highlander placed to his lips, little thinking that *his* lungs could bring any sound from it. But he blew a blast with such ease that he was tempted to try again. As he blew a second time, the slumbering giants stirred. One of them raised himself on his elbow and, rubbing his eyes, warned the

intruder of what would happen to him if he blew the bugle a third time.

Thereupon the intruder fled from the cave; and never thereafter was he able to direct either himself or any other person to its entrance. When he told his neighbours of this experience, they assured him that the place he had found must have been the Great House of Alba.

Cave of Smoo.

Donald, the Wizard of Reay, had learnt the Black Art at a school in Italy, where the Devil Himself occupied a professorial chair. When the school 'went down' at the end of each term, there was always a great commotion, since the Devil insisted on claiming the last scholar as his own. Now, the Devil made a lunge at the Wizard of Reay, in an endeavour to retain him.

"Take the hindmost!" retaliated the Wizard, drawing the Devil's attention to his shadow. So, the Devil seized the hindmost; and that, they say, is how Donald, the Wizard of Reay, managed to escape. When he returned to Scotland, it was soon observed that he threw no shadow, however strong might be the sunlight. And that was the explanation for it.

One day Donald went to keep an appointment with his late professor in the Cave of Smoo. There they quarrelled violently; and Donald took to flight. They say in Sutherland that the hoof marks of Donald's horse may be seen by the entrance to the Cave of Smoo to this day. But Donald himself was not all that one might have desired. In support of this, the natives of Reay used to point to a ring down by the shore, to which he fixed his victims at ebb-tide, so that the flowing tide might drown them. And they say, too, that he always retained the power of being able to visit Italy in a night, and return to Scotland ere dawn—often covered with snow or frost, proving that he had journeyed across the snowy Alps.

Donald also had the faculty of inducing the faeries to accomplish for him all sorts of irksome tasks. He always

could depend upon the faeries to thresh his corn, for example. "Donald's threshing will be a light one!" the folks of Sutherland used to say, when they heard the faeries busy with the flails in his barn.

"You and myself: myself and you!" Donald could be heard to mutter to the faeries as the flails thumped the grain.

Now, the Wizard of Reay one day decided to explore the Cave of Smoo more thoroughly than any one had ever done before. On and on he pushed, far into the dark interior, heedless of the voice that warned him to retreat. At length he came upon a cask. In this cask he proceeded to bore a hole with his knife; and, as the hole was completed, out through it popped a wee, wee man, about an inch and a half in height. This surprised him greatly. But, when the wee figure began to assume giant proportions, surprise gave way to fear.

"Did you ever behold a greater wonder, Donald?" asked the expanding figure.

"Never in all my life," replied the Wizard; "but it would be a greater wonder still if you could become a wee man again!"

Thereat the creature commenced to contract to his original size. When he diminished again to the stature which a man could span easily with his hand, he jumped on the cask and, still contracting, slipped back into it by the hole through which he had made his exit. The Wizard of Reay plugged the hole he had cut with his knife, and then fled forever from the Cave of Smoo.

Cave of the Last of the Giants.

In Ross folk-tales are heard to this day of the last of the giants, who lived in a cave among the Hills of Fearn, and within view of the windows of what to-day is known as Skibo Castle. The giant's daughter was married not to a giant, but to a man of quite ordinary stature. Father-in-law and son-in-law were perpetually at variance.

"Did ever you giants eat beef from an ox as large as this was?" said the son-in-law to the last of the giants, as they dined together one day in the cave.

"Among us giants," replied the father-in-law, "the legs of the birds we consumed were heavier than the hindquarters of the biggest of your oxen."

For this utterance the old giant was laughed to scorn; and it was explained that only his great age and blindness could account for a remark so fantastic. But the giant was determined to vindicate himself.

"Bring me my bow and three arrows," he said to his man-servant, "and lead me out by the hand to yon corrie in the Balnagown Forest."

"Do you see a rock yonder?" he continued.

"I do!" replied his man-servant.

"Are there rushes at the base of it?" he enquired.

"There are," answered the man-servant.

"And do you see a step in the face of the rock?"

"I do," responded the man-servant.

"Take me, then, to that step," said the giant. This the man-servant did.

"Look now, and tell me what comes!"

"I see birds," the servant replied.

"Are they larger than common?"

"No, no larger than in Fearn," the servant replied.

"What are you seeing now?" continued the giant after a moment's pause.

"More and more birds!"

"And are *they* larger than common?"

"Three times bigger than eagles!" replied the servant.

"And are you still seeing birds?" asked the giant.

"Yes, the air is black with them. The biggest of them is bigger three times than the biggest ox!"

"Guide my hand on the bow, then," the giant requested. And so well did the man-servant guide his master's hand that the arrow brought down among the rushes at the foot of the rock the largest of the birds.

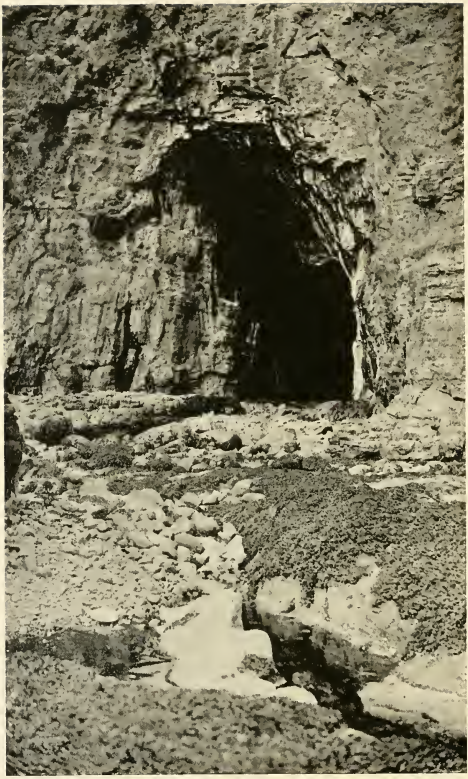
"Take home a hindquarter!" said the giant. And so, between them, giant and servant conveyed home to the cave the ponderous hindquarter.

When they entered the cave, carrying with them their burden, the son-in-law set eyes upon the hindquarter; and he was straightway mystified, since it was so enormous.

At Ahmhor, North Uist. In the background is the hill known as the Crogary Mòr, in which, it is said, is the Cave of Gold containing the fill of seven cow-hides of treasure. [*See P.* 170

At Altnacealgach, on the Road to Assynt and Lochinver, with Suilven on the right and Coul More on the left.

[*Facing P.* 176



Cathedral Cave, Isle of Eigg.

[*Facing P.* 177

Thereupon he repented of his treatment of the blind and agèd giant, and resolved to show him meet deference throughout the remainder of his days.

Among the Hills of Fearn to this day there lies a cave that is said to have been the abode of the last of the giants!

CHAPTER XV

THE LORE OF KIRK AND KIRKYARD

FIVE QUEER STONES OF ROTHIEMURCHUS.

In the Kirkyard of Rothiemurchus there is a recumbent gravestone, on which rest five stones, each about nine inches in diameter, and shaped like a kebbuck of cheese. A stone occupies each of the four corners of the recumbent slab. The fifth stone is set in the centre. The slab marks the tomb of the Shaw who captained the Clan Chattan in the celebrated conflict between the clans on the Insh of Perth—Farquhar Shaw, who led " and was one of the 30 of this Clan who defeated the 30 Davidsons of Inverhavon on the North Insh of Perth 1390. He died 1405."

Tradition asserts that the five stones appear and disappear with the flow and ebb of the fortunes of the family, to which Rothiemurchus belongs. Furthermore, it is held that, like the Yellow Bell of St. Modan and other Celtic bells, which could return to their place, these stones, if removed, have the magical power of finding their way back to the slab marking the grave of Farquhar Shaw, and that calamity assuredly befalls anyone meddling with them.

In this same Kirkyard of Rothiemurchus stand two tombstones very similar in design, and situate within a foot of one another. One of these marks the place of interment of Robert Scroggie, footman to the Duchess of Bedford, who for a time rented the Doune, the ancient, ancestral home of the Grants of Rothiemurchus. The inscription testifies to the fact that Scroggie " was accidentally drowned whilst bathing in the Spey on the 15th October 1830, aged 22 years."

The other tombstone marks the resting-place of Robert Latham, a native of Staffordshire, footman to the Marchioness of Abercorn. Latham, likewise, was drowned

accidentally in the River Spey while bathing in August, 1837, at the age of twenty-three.

Now, it is said that these two footmen had moved at different times one or more of the five queer stones, and that death by drowning was the consequence. One of the footmen, it is believed, actually pitched one into the River Spey. But the stone did not lie long in the bed of the Spey, for on the following morning it was found to have returned to its rightful position in the kirkyard. Less than a week later, the footman was drowned while bathing at the fording-place of the river, not far from the Doune.

* * * * *

On visiting the Doune recently, I was informed of a local baker who, when a choir-boy at the Church of Rothiemurchus, used to remove the five stones from Farquhar Shaw's grave, in company with other boys, and play with them on the sloping gravel path leading down from the Church. This was done in order to explode the belief that calamity, amounting even to death, was sure to overtake those who tampered with these strange stones. Sometimes the boys actually hid the stones in rabbit burrows and elsewhere. But by some mysterious agency they always made their way back to their place in the kirkyard. They say in Rothiemurchus that maybe the beadle sought them out, and replaced them.

* * * * *

In the autumn of 1935, a friend and I wandered casually into the Kirkyard of Rothiemurchus while staying at the Doune. Having heard strange things about the five stones over the fire in the Doune the previous evening, she implored of me not even to touch one of them.

Her theory was that the flat, recumbent slab on which they stand, the surface of which is rough, with no sign of engraving or lettering on it, is in all probability the under-side of a gravestone bearing an inscription on the side now facing downward, and that the five stones are five out of six that once were pedestals keeping the gravestone about a foot off the ground. "May it not be," she observed, "that

the relatives of the corpse lying below, and so weirdly commemorated, deemed it desirable that particulars of his life or death or kindred should remain unknown!"

Suffice it to say that in my own case curiosity, which might have tempted me to explore matters more deeply, was kept in check by my recollection of the strange curse of which I had been told the previous evening, and by the fact that my friend shuddered when I suggested that someone ought to take courage and turn the slab over, so that the world might know whether the other side of it gave any clue likely to lead to the solving of this mystery.

A Minister and Chief at Variance.

All the windows admitting light to the Parish Church of Barra are on one side of the edifice; and local lore tells that this originated in the following manner. Upon a time the minister at Cuier and the Chief of the MacNeils of Barra were at variance as to where the glebe ought to be granted. The minister insisted on having the glebe as near as possible to the manse at Cuier, where it now is. But the Chief, feeling that Cuier was rather close to his own private sanctuary of Eoligarry, offered to grant a glebe elsewhere on the island. Owing to the fact that the alternative site suggested by the Chief was frequently inundated in time of heavy rain by the burns overflowing their banks, the minister flatly declined to accept the offer.

Eventually MacNeil recognised that the only solution of the difficulty was to submit to the minister's demand for the glebe at Cuier. Now, in respect of the relative shallowness of the soil at Cuier and similar agrestic disadvantages, the minister thought himself entitled to a more extensive glebe than would have been his due, had he elected to accept one elsewhere.

Angry, indeed, was MacNeil of Barra when he realised that, even on the question of extent, the minister had outwitted him. And, therefore, in his capacity as laird, he determined to exercise his prerogative in affairs connected with the building of the proposed Parish Church of Barra. Wherefore he ordered that all the windows be on the north-

east side of the Church, lest the sun should shine on the minister while he occupied the pulpit at midday service, and lest he should be able to cast an occasional glance in the direction of his manse when conducting divine worship. And to this day all the windows of this church occur in the wall farthest removed from the sun.

Morag of the Heads.

Lying off the Uidh of Vatersay, one of the Barra Isles, is a tidal islet named Uinessan; and on this islet is the ruined *caibeal,* or chapel, of Saint Brendan. Within this walled burying-place were interred the remains of *Mòr nan Ceann,* Morag of the Heads, who was the wife of one of the Chiefs of Barra. To this day the fisher-folks of the Barra Isles describe this site as *Caibeal Mòr nan Ceann.*

Morag, according to tradition, was a daughter of the laird of Coll. Had the rivals for her hand been cognisant of her dietetic whims, it is doubtful whether Morag would have been wedded at all, as she insisted upon dining on a fresh ox-tongue every day. For long enough did her tholing spouse, MacNeil of Barra, strive to accommodate her in this respect; but seriously diminished became his stock in consequence.

Finally, it occurred to MacNeil that, if he could devise a scheme whereby he might bring home to Morag the enormity of her demand, she would be so horrified at her callous extravagance as to forego her ox-tongue in the future. And, so, MacNeil, who was in residence at Eoligarry with his retinue at the time, directed the herdsman to impound 365 head of cattle in a field viewed from the front windows of Eoligarry House. Greatly excited was Morag when she observed this vast herd from one of the windows; and she proceeded to express her admiration of it in no uncertain terms. And, when MacNeil asked her what should be done to any woman whose inordinate palate was responsible for the slaughter of so great a herd in a single year, she confessed that such a woman ought to be punished severely.

By means of this object-lesson, MacNeil of Barra was able

to illustrate to Morag that, at the rate at which she was consuming ox-tongues, she would be responsible at the end of a year for the slaughter of a herd of that size. And thereafter Morag of the Heads was content with simpler fare.

Morag expressed a desire in her declining years to be interred at a place in sight of her native island of Coll. So, when she departed this life, her remains were conveyed in a boat all the way from Eoligarry to the tiny islet of Uinessan, lying off the Uidh of Vatersay. As the day of her burial was hazy, it was not until the succeeding day, when the mists had lifted, that the Islesfolk discovered Coll could not be seen from Uinessan because of the lofty Island of Muldoanich. MacNeil's people were now eager to exhume Morag's remains; but MacNeil protested, on the ground that already she had given him more bother than she had been worth. Therefore the remains of Morag of the Heads were left undisturbed within the precincts of the now ruined *caibeal* on Uinessan, close to the Isle of Vatersay.

A Tale of the Second-Sight.

The story is told in Harris of how some natives, more endowed with the second-sight than their neighbours, used to be seeing a certain man with an arrow in his thigh. And they believed, therefore, that before he died he would be shot in the thigh with an arrow, possibly in some conflict. In course of time, the man died in the natural way.

Now, it so happened that, at the very hour his body was brought for burial to St. Clement's Church, at Rodil, another funeral arrived. A violent quarrel arose as to which interment should take place first. Soon the respective funeral parties came to blows. In the confusion that ensued, one of their number discharged several arrows from his bow. When, eventually, Sir Norman MacLeod of Berneray, who was present on this occasion, persuaded the rival parties to terminate their strife, it was discovered that, as prophesied by the seers, an arrow had pierced the thigh of the dead man while he lay on his bier, waiting for burial.

This story was related by Sir Norman MacLeod to

Martin Martin, when the latter journeyed through the Hebrides toward the close of the seventeenth century. The most fascinating account of this instance of the second-sight is contained in a letter written by Lord Tarbat in 1699 to Mr Boyle. This letter was forwarded afterwards by Lord Reay to Samuel Pepys, who was desirous of obtaining information on "the second-sight of which people were so persuaded in the Highlands and Islands, that one would be more laught at for not believing it there than affirming it elsewhere."

A Story of Clachan Duich, in Kintail.

At the west end of Clachan Duich, the old Church of Kintail, and within the churchyard, is a slab known in the Gaelic as the *Leac Chuileanach*. And here is its story, as told me in Kintail a few years ago.

One of the MacRaes of Inverinate had been murdered in Strathglas; and immediately a search-party was sent forth from Kintail to recover the body. When they had found it and were making for home with it, they chanced to meet a funeral party on its way with a coffin to the customary place of interment at Strathglas. The Kintail men, eager to pick a quarrel such as would have enabled them to avenge the death of their kinsman, intercepted the funeral party, and straightway deprived it of the *leac*, or stone, that had been intended for the grave of the deceased man. After a skirmish, they succeeded in bringing to Clachan Duich both the corpse of their kinsman and the *leac*. The men of Strathglas—so the story goes—did not dare follow them over the hills to Kintail; and to this day the actual stone may be seen at the old Church of Kintail, within the burying-ground at Clachan Duich.

And this reminds me of a saying in Kintail that, when the holly-tree growing in the cleft of a rock at Torchuilinn (Holly Cliff), a couple of hundred yards away from Clachan Duich, will have split the rock out of which it grows, and be grown enough to render it useful as trams for a sledge, a small boat will be able to convey from Kintail all the MacRaes living there.

THE APPARITION IN A DORNOCH KIRKYARD.

A tradition not dissimilar to that I have given in my recent book, *Somewhere in Scotland,* concerning the finger and thumb marks of the devil, is associated with the town of Dornoch, where in olden times there lived a tailor who declared that he believed neither in witches nor in ghosts. This tailor, so as to demonstrate his disbelief, boasted that he would sit alone in the Cathedral throughout the night, and knit a pair of hose. Accordingly, one day he took up his position in cross-legged fashion before the altar as dusk was falling. While he sat plying his knitting-needles with great earnestness in the small hours, behold! a human skull rose to his sight, and commenced to roll toward him. When it arrived within arm's reach of the tailor, it spoke to him—

"My fleshless and bloodless head rises to greet you!"

"Wait a minute till I've finished my hose!" responded the tailor, and he meanwhile plying his needles with greater concentration and assiduity than ever.

"My great head and my fleshless and bloodless body rise to greet you!" continued the apparition.

"Wait, I tell you, till I've finished the hose!"

As the tailor was saying this, the skeleton began to rise higher and higher, until at last its full stature was visible, from crown of head to tip of toe. But not until the tailor had completed his undertaking did he dare set eyes on the skeleton. As he fled from the Cathedral with the ghostly form in pursuit of him, he slammed the door behind him. Suddenly held up in his endeavour to overtake the fleeing tailor, the skeleton seized the doorposts; and it is said in Sutherland that, up till the time when the Cathedral was restored, the imprint of his long, lean finger-bones were to be seen on those door-posts.

An Inverness-shire version of this tale places the incident in Beauly Abbey, where the tailor plied his knitting-needles by candle-light, until the skeleton blew it out.

With modifications, this tale is also told of a ghost haunting the old chapel of Killineuer, near the foot of Loch Awe. To this day, it is said, on the lintel of the ruined

chapel doorway may be seen the mark left by the hand of the ghost as it struck the lintel in his great lunge to grasp the fleeing tailor.

Pursued by the Devil.

To digress for a moment from kirks and kirkyards to castles, tradition in Kintyre claims that the five large indentations in one of the pillars supporting the entrance gate to Saddell Castle are the finger and thumb imprint of the devil. The story goes that the laird of Saddell, in mischievous mood, wagered a wee tailor in the village to spend the night alone among the tombstones in the neighbouring graveyard by the Abbey of Saddell, which is believed to be haunted. The wee tailor accepted the challenge; and it was agreed that he would take with him sufficient material to make a pair of trousers during the night. Off he went, and took up his position, tailorwise, on a tombstone. Suddenly the earth began to rumble, and a recumbent slab near at hand commenced to heave. Then an enormous head appeared, and a voice was heard saying: "Do you see this great head of mine?"

"Ay, ay, I'm seeing it," responded the wee tailor; "but I'm too busy making my breeks."

Then an enormous pair of shoulders appeared, and a voice enquired: "Do you see these great shoulders of mine?" And the wee tailor said: "Ay, ay," and went on with his task.

Then the earth gave another rumble, and a great body made its appearance, and a voice said: "Do you see this great body of mine?"

"Ay, ay, I'm seeing it; but I must get finished with my breeks," replied the wee tailor.

Then a great leg and foot appeared, and stamped on the slab with such violence that the whole burying-ground quaked. "Do you see this great foot of mine?" asked the apparition.

"Ay, ay, I do that," said the wee tailor; "but my breeks are finished, though the stitches may be ower long."

Tucking the trousers under his arm and putting the

thimble in his pocket, he quickly snipped the thread, and took to his heels, the Evil One in pursuit of him. Down the glen he ran, toward the Castle of Saddell—down the long beech avenue, the pursuer gaining on him with every step. The tailor just succeeded in reaching the castle gate, and in closing it fast behind him. In wrath the ghostly form crashed his hand against one of the stone pillars supporting the gate; and the imprint of his fingers and thumb may be seen there to this day.

And this brings us to the next tale.

The Brogues of Love.

It was at her sister's wedding-feast in her old father's barn in Glen Barr that Mairi herself first put the spell on Eachunn, the brightest and brawest chiel in all Kintyre; and from that very day the brogues of love took their own way on the road to romance.

Well, the long, dreary winter nights were nearing an end, for the spring evenings already had unsheathed their green excaliburs, and, with the dexterity of good swordsmen, were fencing vigorously before the onset of summer. Bonnie, indeed, is Kintyre at this time of the year, with its mossy-green straths and wimpling burns, each with a melody of its own to sing, and a story of its own to tell.

Now, the incident I am about to narrate occurred in the days when the roof was still on the old Abbey of Windswept Saddell of Monks. Built, it is supposed, in the time of the Great Somerled within the quiet seclusion of a glen running down to the western sea, this hoary place long maintained its association with the powerful Lords of the Isles; but, following upon the decay of their authority, and the consequent decline in their benevolence and patronage, the Cistercian monastery at Saddell began to sink gently into lassitude and dreamy forgetfulness.

Howbeit, there still remained within its hallowed walls a few of the holy brethren. Old and feeble though they had grown, they faithfully kept a dim, mysterious lamp burning on the high altar, whereon rested in solemn silence the skull of the founder of their Abbey. And eerie are the folk-tales

recounted in the clachans of Kintyre about the skull that lay so long upon the high altar.

Who would be so daring as to remove at dead of night the skull from the Abbey of Windswept Saddell of Monks? Many strange happenings had the bens and glens of Kintyre witnessed; but the mere suggestion of carrying away the skull from the Abbey during the night-time was sufficient to strike terror into the most fearless of the wights of Argyll.

Meanwhile time was slowly drifting on. Summer had tripped past in her brogues of scarlet and magenta: autumn had come and gone in her golden brogues; and, ere winter had long been creeping over the hills of Kintyre in her white, silent slippers, Eachunn, the smith's son, had summed up courage, and was asking Mairi's father whether he could be taking the lassie to his own fireside.

"*O Righ!*" exclaimed the old smith, his face red as a glowing peat. "You will never be taking Mairi home to your fireside if *I* can be helping it!"

"Och, och, be thinking better of it, father, for it's Eachunn that has the heart of me," replied Mairi, sobbing bitterly because of the old man's attitude.

"Well," said the old smith, rising passionately to his feet after a few moments' cogitation, "I have thought better of it. If this very night you go across the hill to the Abbey, and bring back with you the skull that rests on the high altar, it's Eachunn that can be having you."

"That I will do," replied the lassie in a moment of excitement, her eyes flashing angrily on the old man who had been so cruel as to tempt her to do what he well knew no man in all Kintyre had the courage to do. And little was he thinking that Mairi had taken him at his word, until he saw her hurry out into the cold, frosty night, with her plaid wrapped tightly round her.

Over the hill and down the long, dark valley of Saddell she went, with the keen night-wind piercing her to the bone, until at length she came to the Abbey. As she crept through the eerie burial-ground, wherein every tombstone stood out against the night like a blackened ghost, there was a sudden flutter in the tall, beechen grove that sheltered

the Abbey. This, in all conscience, was sufficient to startle the most unsuperstitious person; but a few seconds later it was followed by a sound even more uncanny, for, when she drew nigh to the Abbey door, she was nearly frightened out of her wits by the rushing of a score of little feet. "What could those strange sounds possibly be?" she asked herself. Had she really heard something, or was she merely imagining things? Were these lost souls scurrying by?

For a moment Mairi stood motionless in the silent graveyard, so terrified that she could neither approach the Abbey door, nor yet turn in the direction of home. An awkward predicament to be in, you may well imagine! But, terror-stricken as she was, she remembered her errand, and the prize that depended on its success. So she pulled herself together and, opening the old, oak door that creaked on its loose and rusty hinges, she bravely stepped into the darkness of the Abbey.

In a trice her eyes fell upon the high altar, on which lay the skull that, in the faint glimmering of the old lamp, seemed to grow larger and larger in the musty blackness encircling every pew and cob-webbed rafter. Stealthily Mairi approached the skull. With a cold shudder, she picked it up, and wrapped it in the folds of her plaid. Then she made for the open again. And, as she was closing behind her the creaking Abbey door, she again was startled by the swift pattering of small feet; and her heart leapt with fear and trembling. But, as she crept through the snow-wreathed burial-ground, and under the drooping boughs of the tall beech-trees that appeared to be frowning down upon her, all trepidation was dispelled, for she caught a passing glimpse of a herd of deer that, owing to the hard winter, had been forced to seek shelter under the ivied shadow of the old Abbey wall.

Homeward by the side of the Monks' Brook, over many a hill and down many a dale travelled Mairi with her prize. Love had conquered fear; and the return journey seemed ever so much shorter. At the mouth of the grey morning, with her hair and cheeks adorned by the pearly beads of a winter's dew, Mairi came again into the house of her father,

weary in body but happy in spirit. There her father, careworn and bent, awaited her homecoming. A night's sorrow and anxiety had made a decrepit man of him, since never again did he expect to see his Mairi in the flesh.

"God be merciful to me, a sinner!" he exclaimed, as Mairi entered the door, and placed upon the table the skull that, in a fit of temper, he had provoked her to remove from the Abbey at dead of night.

Before the sun had risen far above the eastern hills, Eachunn and Mairi were again in one another's keeping, for the brogues of love had found the feet for which they were designed. By the end of the week Glen Barr was celebrating a wedding, the like of which it never since has witnessed.

Not much more is there for me to tell you. But, in concluding this story, I should add that the skull was duly returned to Saddell Abbey. There it lies before the high altar that is now a memorial to the local lads who, in the Great War, were sacrificed for our transgressions.

Origin of the Reel o' Tulloch.

Let us draw this chapter to a conclusion with a folk-tale describing how the famous Reel o' Tulloch came into existence.

One cold Sabbath morning, the minister of the Church of Tullich elected to remain by his own fireside, rather than face the inclemency of the day, and the extreme discomfort of his church. The congregation, however, had assembled in the usual way. As time wore on, and no minister put in his appearance, its members gradually became restless with the cold. Soon they were clapping their hands and stamping their feet. The younger members began to play about; and before long both young and old were joining in strange, unseemly merriment. A collection was then taken, which enabled the revellers to obtain from somewhere or other a cask of good ale. The ale gave the company both warmth and spirit. A local musician then produced his fiddle, and thereupon improvised an air that ever since has been known as the Reel o' Tulloch. To this reel the entire congregation danced.

And it is said that, when everyone was exhausted with dancing, the local shoemaker ascended the pulpit and held forth with a fire worthy of Calvin or of John Knox. A number of tailors and weavers then installed themselves as elders, and were duly 'sessioned.' Meantime, the precentor's place had been taken by the village blacksmith, who is described as having led the congregation in "a gude and godly ballad."

CHAPTER XVI

FOLK-TALES OF THE BOW AND ARROW

Little James of Loch Achray.

In olden times there lived in a diminutive stronghold on an islet in Loch Achray a diminutive warrior named Seumas Beag, or Little James. Seumas was as valiant as he was diminutive; and in recognition of his valour he had been appointed keeper of the royal forests of Glen Finglas and Glen Artney. One day a band of poaching Campbells from Argyll, armed with bows and arrows, which of course were the lethal weapons of the period, were passing by Loch Achray with the trophies of their unlawful chase, when they encountered Seumas Beag, whom they did not recognise as being the king's forester.

Said one of the Campbells to Seumas, and he meanwhile pointing to the tiny stronghold in Loch Achray: "What hawk has built her nest on yon island?"

"A hawk less savage than the hawks from Argyll," retorted Seumas Beag.

"Tell that hawk from us," responded one of the Campbells, "that before long we will be back to plunder her nest!"

"But for all *you* know," replied the king's forester, "that hawk may be able to call upon other hawks for aid. It's strange the way the hawks inhabiting these parts fly to the protection of their own kind at the first sign of danger!"

The Campbells went their way; and in due course they returned to harry the nest on the isle in Loch Achray. But Seumas Beag and his staff, with a plentiful supply of arrows, made ready against their coming. Of those who came down to the shore of Achray that day to harry the hawk's nest, few returned alive to their homes in Argyll.

But the story does not end here, for among the most deadly of Seumas Beag's archers was one named Menzies, on whom the Campbells swore that they would wreak vengeance. Some weeks later, five of the Campbells, who previously had escaped the onslaught of Seumas Beag and his staff, set out from Argyll to capture Menzies. In the vicinity of the Falls of Leny they met a man tending cattle. They did not suspect him to be the very Menzies for whom they were searching, since he was totally unarmed, and feigned to exhibit in their bows and arrows an interest which misled the Campbells into believing that he had never handled a bow in his life. When he asked to what use they put these instruments, the Campbells were amused; and one of their number gave him his bow, and commenced to instruct him as to how it should be used. This instruction proved to be the Campbells' undoing, for, while Menzies borrowed all their arrows, and clumsily shot them into the same spot only a short distance off, he was creating for himself a position of strategy. When he had fired the last arrow into the ground but a few yards ahead of him, he dashed forward with the bow to the spot at which lay most of the arrows, turned about, and proceeded to shoot down the Campbells. Ere they were able to retrieve even one of their arrows, Menzies had accounted for three of them. The remaining two, unable to withstand the marksmanship of their assailant, fled for shelter, and found their way home as best they could, leaving Menzies to resume the tending of his cattle without let or hindrance.

Lieutenant of the Coast.

Situated at the southern entrance to Loch Bretil, in the west of Skye, is a headland known as *Rudh' an Dunain,* Headland of the Little Dun. Here it was that, night and day in olden times, MacLeod of MacLeod maintained a Lieutenant of the Coast as a means of protecting his territory against the punitive and predatory raids of the Northmen, and of the MacDonalds of Clan Ranald, who came sailing out from the shelter of the Small Isles, which they used as a convenient jumping-off place for their attacks

Five strange stones in the kirkyard at Rothiemurchus. [*See P.* 178

Clachan Duich, the old Church of Kintail. Hidden in mist lies Ben Attow.

[*Facing P.* 192

Sheep-shearing at Achallader, in Glen Orchy.

Frosted bulrushes by the frozen shore of Loch Achray, with Ben Venue in the background. (On an islet near at hand stood the stronghold of the warrior, Little James of Loch Achray.) [*See P.* 191

[*Facing P.* 193

on the south-western parts of MacLeod's Country. At the very extremity of this headland is the *gob,* or beak, whereon at night-time, and when necessary, the garrison of the *dun* kindled a signal fire, so as to warn the inhabitants of Glen Bretil and of the surrounding country that an invasion was imminent, or had just taken place.

The office of Lieutenant of the Coast at Rudh' an Dunain was a hereditary one, bestowed on a family named MacAskill; and among the more dauntless of these Lieutenants was Donald Dubh MacAskill. There was none in all the Isles more adept with the bow and arrow than Donald Dubh.

One day he noticed a barge of the Clan Ranald in the Sound of Canna. Like all the sea-watchmen of his time, he had good eyesight. As the barge approached Rudh' an Dunain, Donald Dubh recognised it to be intent on plunder, and manned by twelve stalwart MacDonalds. He quietly retired to the *dun* to collect an ample quiver, and then concealed himself behind a rock, from which he fired twelve arrows that killed the twelve rowers. Soon Clan Ranald's barge, with its lifeless ballast, came ashore; and it was dashed to splinters against the very rocks at Rudh' an Dunain that it had hoped to make in happier circumstances.

Not very long ago a local landowner, while digging in his garden on the adjacent Isle of Soay, came upon a flint arrow-head that puzzled him greatly. Perhaps it was one of those shot at some time or other by one of the hereditary Lieutenants of the Coast.

This recalls another tale concerning a Lieutenant of the Coast who was known throughout Skye as *Mac Dhomhnuill Duibh*—Son of Black Donald. In pursuance of his duties, this Lieutenant apprehended a man who formerly had been convicted of cattle-lifting, fire-raising, and even of murder. The Son of Black Donald did not detain him long in captivity, but tried him on the spot. He decided to execute him; but, before doing so, he brought the prisoner to his own house, and supplied him extravagantly with bread and cheese and whisky, that it might thereby be the more able to endure his last moments on earth.

Thereafter the Son of Black Donald marched his captive

up a steep brae above the sea at Rudh' an Dunain, and beheaded him with his own sword. And the head rolled down the slope, crying out as it rolled: "*Faire, Faire, Mhic Dhomhnuill Dhuibh!* Beware, Beware, O Son of Black Donald!"

The Fate of Carn Ban.

Situated on an eminence about three miles beyond the entrance to Glen Lyon, and at a point where the glen makes a sweeping bend, are the ruins of the Castle of the White Cairn. The Castle, usually referred to simply as Carn Ban, was the keep of Red Duncan of the Hospitality. This Duncan Campbell was the second laird of the Campbells of Glen Lyon; and he received for his generosity a reputation far exceeding that bestowed upon any other member of his clan. Historical records show that Red Duncan's beneficence extended even to visitors from Ireland. Irish bards frequently were entertained at Carn Ban.

Not long after Red Duncan's death, a sad day dawned in Glen Lyon when a rieving band from Lochaber came dashing down upon it, plundering as it went. When the rievers came to Carn Ban, they took up their position on the opposite bank of the Lyon, immediately facing the stronghold. Hitherto Carn Ban had been impregnable; but from this vantage-point one of the Lochaber bowmen fired into its summer-parched thatch an arrow, to which was attached a flaming piece of cloth. Thus much of the ancient keep was destroyed; and never since the visit of the men from Lochaber has this site been occupied.

A Folk-tale of Western Lewis.

Situated at the river-mouth between Arnol and Bragair, in western Lewis, is Loch a' Bhaile, on an islet in which stands the *tur*, or tower, that once was the stronghold of a certain Black Neil, an outlaw from the mainland who defended himself with bow and arrow. Neil was a proficient archer. When circumstances demanded, he used to forsake his *tur* in Loch a' Bhaile to take up residence in another retreat on Arrow Island, in Barvas Bay. It was

while he occupied his fort in Loch a' Bhaile, however, that there occurred an incident round which the following folk-tale has gathered.

Off the coast of Ness, the northernmost part of Lewis, there anchored at a date unknown a sailing-vessel manned by one of the strangest crews the inhabitants of the Hebrides had ever beheld. In course of time these weather-beaten seamen came ashore at "the Stoth," near the Butt of Lewis. They were well received by the people of Ness. As was the wont until two or three hundred years ago, all strangers who came to these parts, either by land or by sea, were given hospitality at "the Big House of Habost," where lived the hereditary brieve, or justiciar, of the Lewis.

It soon transpired that the strangers were monks, who had sailed from Iona to spread the Gospel among what they imagined to have been a semi-barbarous race. The success of their mission in Ness induced them to go farther afield; and so in time they proceeded southward along the western coast of Lewis by Shader and Barvas, until they arrived at Arnol. On a dread day they essayed to pass along the narrow strip of land separating Loch a' Bhaile from the ocean, when Black Neil, secreted in his *tur* quite close at hand, sent an arrow through the breast of all who came within reach of his bow. The surviving monks fled by the water's edge until they came to *Teampull Eoin,* the Temple of John, the ruins of which may yet be seen in the churchyard, hard by Bragair Bay. In *Teampull Eoin* they sought sanctuary. The dead monks were interred at a spot by the side of a knoll that to this day is known as *Cnoc nam Manach,* the Monks' Hill. And the old folks living at Arnol and Bragair assured me that their tombstones may still be located. They told me, moreover, that eventually Black Neil was brought to justice when a famous archer from the mainland was dispatched to the Hebrides, and concealed in a cavern overlooking his fortress in Loch a' Bhaile. This archer, they say, dislodged Black Neil.

The Fury of the Quiver.

About the time that dynastic differences were playing havoc with the ancient heritage of the MacLeods of Lewis,

Neil MacLeod, uncle of Torquil Dubh, Chief of the Lewis, attacked the Morrisons on the moor at Habost, but was defeated by them. While Neil was awaiting the arrival of reinforcements from Harris, the Morrisons betook themselves to Dun Eistein, whither Neil and his allies followed them during the night.

Unaware of the presence of the enemy in the neighbourhood of Dun Eistein, one of the Morrisons exposed himself unwittingly to 'the Fury of the Quiver'—a Celtic term applied to a special arrow never drawn from the quiver except in circumstances of extreme peril. Into the breast of this Morrison, a MacLeod in hiding shot 'the Fury.' The victim's cries were heard by his companions; and there hastened out of the Dun a certain Alan Morrison, the most valiant man among them, who leapt across the ravine separating Dun Eistein from the adjacent cliffs, and craved that the cowardly assassin be handed over to him. But the MacLeods feigned ignorance of the incident; and it was Alan who was swift to reproach them with cowardice, since they had come to Dun Eistein under cover of darkness, and had begun their campaign before there was sufficient daylight to enable the opposing forces to distinguish one another. In common with the Scandinavians, the Celts had the notion that to slay an enemy after nightfall was a serious infringement of battle etiquette.

The MacLeods ultimately conceded to Alan Morrison's petition that, by way of indemnity for their unchivalrous act, the wounded Morrison might have the services of the physician accompanying the MacLeods. And, so, Alan tucked the enemy's physician under his oxter, and leapt back across the ravine with him to Dun Eistein. Nevertheless, the unfortunate Morrison succumbed to the wound inflicted by the 'Fury of the Quiver.'

The Prowess of Iain Beag MacAndrea.

Upon the hillside above the banks of the River Dulnain, just by the forlorn farm-steading of Dalnahaitnach, stands a granite monument some five feet in height, quite close

to the beautiful hill-road leading round the base of Inverlaidnan Hill and over General Wade's bridge at Sluggan to Slochd, the "Pit" through which passes the railway and the Great North Road between Perth and Inverness. This monument bears the following inscription:—"Erected by the Carrbridge Gaelic Ceilidh in memory of Iain Beag MacAndrea who lived here early in the 17th century. He was a noted Archer and by his skill with the Bow and Arrow prevented many Cattle Raiders entering Strathspey."

Iain Beag's home was located at Dalnahaitnach; and the shepherds and gamekeepers employed in this solitary region actually give this name to the heap of stones said to have formed its walls.

Of the exploits of Ian Beag MacAndrea, little to-day is remembered, though in the following folk-tale the recollection of his prowess is perpetuated. With his bow and arrow Iain Beag had killed a cattle-riever; and nothing would satisfy the riever's kinsfolk but that Iain Beag should be brought to account. Thus it was that one day, while Iain was seated by his fireside at Dalnahaitnach, eight men crowded on his threshold, seeking his life.

"Is it Iain Beag you'll be wanting?" asked his wife on going to the door with an air of indifference.

"Well, he's up the brae with the cattle," she replied to their answering her in the affirmative. "I'll send the herd after him," she continued.

Thereupon she turned to Iain, and in the presence of those seeking vengeance gave him a good, Scots clout on the lug, and sent him off after his master. Meanwhile she hastily prepared a meal for the eight visitors. When they had finished the meal, one by one they filed out of the house, impatient to encounter the object of their visit. As they filed out, one by one they were brought down by the arrows of Iain Beag, who in the interval had concealed himself among the boughs of a pine-tree commanding the doorway of his home at Dalnahaitnach.

And I am assured by those inhabiting the upper reaches of Strath Spey and Strath Dearn that even yet you may trace the graves of the slain, down by the River Dulnain.

A Flaming Arrow.

A story still related in Spey-side describes the way in which the old Church of Kincardine was deliberately gutted by fire when, some time during the fifteenth century, a band of men intent on revenge sent into its thatched roof an arrow, to which was attached a flaming piece of lint.

While a Grant of Rothiemurchus and a number of Comyns were on a visit to the Baron of Kincardine, a fierce dispute broke out between the guests—a dispute that terminated only when the Grant fell dead beneath the *sgian-dubh* of one of the Comyns. Aware of the consequences that were sure to pursue them at the hands of the Clan Grant, who at a moment's notice could summon to arms a formidable force, the Comyns betook themselves to the Church of Kincardine, wherein they sought sanctuary. As they bolted the church-door behind them, they must have realised that, on the most generous calculation, their capitulation was a matter of a day or two, since not only was a contingent of Grants at their heels, but they had in their place of refuge neither food nor water. Before long the Grants were reinforced by the Stewarts, who likewise sought the blood of the Comyns in respect of the gross breach of the etiquette of Highland hospitality one of their number had perpetrated.

As Stewarts and Grants clamoured outside the Church, they decided not to protract matters, since they knew that thirst and starvation were bound to effect either the death or the surrender of the refugees within. The fever of vengeance was high; and an immediate reprisal was demanded. So, the polite formality of waiting was dispensed with; and an arrow with a fragment of flaming lint was shot into the roof of sun-parched thatch. "The missile rose slowly and fell," writes a modern reciter of Highland tales, "striking the rushes without sound, and silence fell upon the attackers as a little, scarlet line ran along the ridge where the thatch was driest."[1] Soon the entire edifice was ablaze. When the rafters gave way and the roof fell in, the doom of the hapless Comyns was sealed.

[1] *The Secret of Spey*, by Wendy Wood, p. 128.

A place of sanctuary had become the veriest place of anguish and death. Only one of the Comyns essayed to escape. His career was short-lived, since the enemy demanded of him the full penalty. And it is said that the Stewarts and the Grants, and all their kinsfolk who were able to travel to the scene, stood by and watched the leaping flames with exultance.

Such was the fate that overtook a sept, one of whose number had left his fellow-guest a cold, stiff corpse on his host's floor.

CHAPTER XVII

RIEVERS' AND CATERANS' TALES

IT is curious that nearly all the Highland and Island folk-tales, into which the bow and arrow are introduced—and their number is inexhaustible—relate the exploits of rievers and caterans, and the manner in which such lawless members of society in olden times were either killed or disabled, or were otherwise prevented from achieving what they desired, as when the bow and arrow were used for sending a fragment of flaming lint into the thatched roof of an edifice harbouring an enemy difficult to dislodge. Tales, such as that recounted in the previous chapter about Black Neil and his retreat on Arrow Island, are much less common.

But the folk-tales of the bow and arrow by no means exhaust the supply of traditional story connected with the endeavours, achievements, and failures of robbers and footpads, and perhaps more especially of that species of Highland society known as the cattle-riever. At a period when livestock comprised almost the entire moveable property of the bulk of the community, it is not surprising that the practice of cattle-lifting should have been so prevalent, and should have occupied so prominent a place in the everyday life of the people.

The following tales are but a selection from an endless number still recounted at winter *ceilidhs* round the peat-fires in the more remote parts of the Highlands and in the Hebrides.

The Fate of MacNeish.

On Innis Bhuidhe, that islet in the centre of the River Dochart overshadowed by gloomy pines and larches, is the

walled sepulchre of the MacNabs, at both ends of which is a stone image representing the head of MacNeish of Loch Earn, so as to remind all, whom it may concern, of the fate that befell that transgressor.

One wintry day, when returning home with provisions from Crieff, the son of MacNab of Kinnell was waylaid and robbed by a MacNeish. MacNab anxiously awaited the return of his son that wintry day. At length he turned up, but without the provisions for which he had been sent to Crieff. When he related his story, MacNab swore vengeance on MacNeish. And, so, he hurried up the valley of the burn known as *Allt na Breaclaich* to the loch of the same name, and carried off on his broad shoulders the boat from which he used to fish that loch. Up hill and down dale he went, until eventually he came to the eastern end of Loch Earn. There he launched the boat, and rowed over to what still goes by the name of Neish Island.

"Who's there?" uttered a voice, when MacNab rapped at MacNeish's door. "If its Smooth John that's in it, he'll not be smooth to me this day!"

The story is told that Smooth John MacNab beheaded MacNeish, and bore his head to Killin, that all might see it, and duly take heed. Hence the head of MacNeish carved in stone at both ends of the MacNabs' burying-place on Innis Bhuidhe, at Killin. And the old folks of Killin declare that, as the result of Smooth John's raid on Neish Island, the MacNeishes would have become defunct, had not a small boy escaped his sword that day.

How Black Roderic Died.

In the elfin Isle of Barra the story is told of how Black Roderic the Unjust, one of the MacNeil Chiefs of that island, met his death. With his eight-oared galley and a resolute crew, Black Roderic sailed to the Isle of Mull on a rieving venture. Round the oars of the galley he wrapped cloth, lest they should be noisy in the rowlocks; and at nightfall he and his men put ashore below Duart Castle, on the Sound of Mull. They crept up to the Castle's walls;

but, with the exception of a little, lame tailor who, with legs crossed in appropriate fashion, sat sewing in an alcove, not a living soul did there appear to be about the place. In upon the unsuspecting tailor rushed Black Roderic MacNeil, who was about to put him to death when a watchman, hitherto concealed, thrust a dirk into Black Roderic's thigh, and raised the alarm.

Seizing the dirk, and holding it tightly in position, Black Roderic withdrew his men, and sped to his galley. He then gave orders to put back to Barra with all haste, that he might have the satisfaction of expiring in his ancestral hall. Whenever he set foot in Kisimul Castle, he let go his hold of the dirk, and out of him flowed the life that was in him.

And thus, they say in the Outer Isles, died Black Roderic the Unjust, XXXVIIIth Chief of the MacNeils of Barra.

Neil of the Snow-drift.

Untrained in warlike activities, possessing worldly goods in the form of cattle and sheep, and far removed from succour in the event of distress, the natives of Heiskeir, or the Monach Isles, often had to contend in olden times with the rapacity of their Hebridean neighbours, who from time to time would be surprising them, and carrying off as large a spreagh as could be accommodated aboard their sailing-craft. On one occasion a band of rieving Lewismen set out in a commodious galley for the Monach Isles, intent on plunder. They sailed down the west coast of Harris and North Uist, until they arrived opposite Ceann Ear, one of the Heiskeir group. But weather conditions turned out less propitious than when they left home; and they sorely needed a pilot to navigate their craft through the treacherous seaways now dividing them from Port Roy and the well-stocked folds of Heiskeir. Reluctantly, they disembarked at Port Scolpaig, on the shores of Balranald, in North Uist, in the hope of kidnapping a suitable pilot, for they knew that their scheme would be too obvious to any seaman whom they might ask to take them across.

Eventually they came to the door of a lonely black-house near Port Scolpaig, occupied by a solitary cratur named Neil, who evidently was unaccustomed even to the meagrest necessities of life, and whom they were very chary about carrying off to their boat.

However, since there was no other abode within sight, it was decided to make the best of things with the pilot on whom they had set their minds, if only the wretched Neil could be expected to continue in life until he had guided their galley in by Stockay and the Eel to Port Roy, the only harbour of the Monach Isles where it is possible to effect a landing with any degree of safety, except under the calmest conditions.

To Neil's insisting that he was unfamiliar with the recognised route to Port Roy, they replied that, for his own personal safety, he had better do his best to keep the boat off the sunken skerries fringing these islands: to his pleading that the voyage would be the death of him, the Lewismen retorted: "You will not die till we reach Heiskeir anyway." And so they dragged him aboard, raised anchor, and spread sail for Port Roy. The wind was at the canvas in a trice, and Neil on the look-out at the bow, keen-eyed as a scart, his teeth chattering with the cold, and his mind devising a scheme for the destruction of the vessel and crew, and the saving of himself.

When halfway across the Sound, there came a heavy fall of snow. Soon Neil detected the noise of the sea breaking on the rocky islet of Stockay, off the east coast of Ceann Ear, and passed by those navigating between North Uist and the harbour of Port Roy: soon the boat was steered past the tortuous reef known as the Eel. Every one aboard now had the idea that the boat was within close proximity to the cattle-folds of Heiskeir; but Neil deceived the Lewismen into believing that they were still some considerable way off the actual channel to Port Roy. Suddenly there was a terrific crash! Having taken advantage of the falling snow that made it impossible for any stranger in the boat to recognise his whereabouts, Neil steered the galley on to some wild rocks a little to the south of the harbour; but, before she actually struck, the unfaithful pilot was already

clinging desperately to the crags, several feet above the tide. In a second or two he had clambered out of danger to a spot from which he witnessed the destruction of the would-have-been plunderers from Lewis, as they scrambled helplessly amid a wreckage of masts and sails and an upturned boat.

The bodies of most of the Lewismen, it is said, were cast upon the shores of the Monach Isles. The Heiskeir folks interred them without much ceremony at a place not far from the rocks where they met their doom. They say, too, that a number of stones marks the graves of the luckless Lewismen; but I have never seen these stones, although I profess to having examined these islands fairly thoroughly.

And what of Neil, the unfaithful mariner? Well, they say that so grateful to him were the inhabitants of the Monach Isles for his having saved their property, and possibly their lives also, and at considerable personal peril, that they persuaded him to abandon his lonely house by the shores of Balranald, and spent the remainder of his years at Port Roy. And ever after this episode he went by the name of *Niall a' Chabhaidh,* Neil of the Snow-drift.

And so improved was Neil's health by the attentions of the kindly natives of Heiskeir that eventually he married, and begat a large family. And he became the head of a tribe known in the Isles as *Sliochd Neill a' Chabhaidh,* the Race of Neil of the Snow-drift. In later years many members of his tribe migrated to the mainland of North Uist; and not a few of them went forth to dominions across the seas.

The Cattle-Rievers of Aignish.

Within a few miles of the town of Stornoway lies Aignish, where may be seen the ruined Church of St. Columba, within the precincts of which are interred the remains of no fewer than nineteen Chiefs of the hapless MacLeods of Lewis, whose patronymic was Siol Torquil, the Seed of Torquil. Dogged by adversity were the Siol Torquil Chieftains. The early years of the seventeenth

century found the artful MacKenzies of Kintail in full possession of the Lewis, and of everything that pertained to the MacLeods' heritage.[1]

Now, it was while a MacLeod woman was herding cows on the machar at Aignish that a storm compelled her to seek shelter in the old burying-place of the Siol Torquil Chieftains. At the greying of day, she heard a scurrying of feet outwith the dyke separating the burying-place from the machar. On turning her attention to the direction from which the sound came, she observed that a band of MacKenzies was in the act of 'lifting' the cattle grazing on the machar. This happened, of course, about the time that the MacKenzies were scheming to displace the poor MacLeods of Lewis! Straightway the MacLeod woman rose to her feet; and, pretending that she was the wraith of one of the nineteen departed Chiefs mouldering in the mools, she shouted in a loud voice: "*A Chlann 'ic Leoid, nach eirich sibh?* O Clan Leod, will you not rise?"

Thereupon the rieving MacKenzies fled from Aignish, leaving behind them the cattle they fain would have stolen.

Fate of a Lochaber Cateran.

Lochaber in olden times was notorious for its caterans and footpads; and the story I have just related about the rievers at Aignish, in the Lewis, recalls the folk-tale of the fate that overtook a Lochaber riever, who sought to interfere with the cattle belonging to the minister of Glen Elg.

It is said that in former years the parish manse of Glen Elg was situated in the adjacent valley known as Glen Beag, up beside the ancient Pictish brochs. Indeed, the site is still pointed out. It happened that on one occasion, when the Lochaber caterans came over the hills to rieve, they repulsed the Glen Elg men in a skirmish in which one of the caterans was severely wounded. The Glen Elg minister took the wounded man to his manse, kept him

[1] For a detailed description of Aignish, see Chapter V of my book, *The Haunted Isles.*

there, and nursed his wounds until he was fit to return the way he had come. One evening the Lochaber man, in thanking the minister for his kindness, announced that he thought he was now well enough to depart. That evening, then, he took leave of his host; and, in doing so, he drove off some of the minister's cattle at the same time. Missing the hill-track at the top of Glen Beag, he chanced to meet a stranger in the twilight, of whom he enquired the way. It was agreed that, if the stranger directed him to the track, he would hand over to him a couple of the beasts in recompense. The stranger thereupon led him on; and, when they came to the edge of the precipice by the tall waterfall in Glen Beag, he pushed the cateran over. Down he crashed to his death. Thereafter the stranger, who happened to be the minister himself, took possession of his own cattle, and returned in triumph to the manse to receive the congratulations of his parishioners for his valorous performance.

The Rieving Exploits of Iain Gearr.

On the rocky shore of Ardnamurchan, and situated between the village of Kilchoan and the headland known as the *Sron Bheag,* or Little Nose, is a cave that goes by the name of Short John MacIan's Cave. Short John, or Iain Gearr, as we shall refer to him for the purposes of this story, lived some time during the eighteenth century; and he was namely for his robberies and cattle-liftings. He belonged to that sept of the MacDonalds known as the MacIans of Ardnamurchan, the chief members of which, it is said, once resided at Mingary Castle. So numerous and extensive were his depredations that he was obliged to resort to all manner of schemes to avoid apprehension. They say in Ardnamurchan, for instance, that he never painted both sides of his boat the same colour, and that he often repainted his craft in different colours. In this wise, when news went round the district that he had been sighted off the Ardnamurchan coast in a white boat, the natives, noticing his craft from a different angle, declared that they

saw no white boat, but a black one, or perhaps a green one. The confusion Iain Gearr maintained by his frequent recourse to the paint-pot did much to keep him out of the clutches of those who would have dragged him to account.

Iain Gearr's mother, on her husband's death, married a native of Mull, an island on which Iain's rieving exploits had rendered it unsafe for him to land. As it happened, his mother eventually died on Mull, and was about to be interred there. But the idea that her remains should rest in Mull soil sorely troubled Iain Gearr; and so he resolved to get possession of the body, and bring it home for interment in the old burying-place of his kinsfolk, at Kilchoan. A dark and stormy night (so essential a setting for a story of this nature!) was selected for the voyage to Mull. When Iain Gearr and two accomplices arrived at the house of the dead, they found it unoccupied. Having made a large hole in the turf wall, they wrapped the corpse in a plaid, and hastened off with it to their boat by the shore. They rowed; and they rowed; and in course of time they came under the lee of Ardnamurchan. As they sat resting awhile on the shore with the corpse beside them, one of Iain Gearr's companions noticed that something was moving under the plaid.

"Iain, yer mother's no' dead yut!" exclaimed the companion.

"Iss she no'?" enquired Iain.

"No, she's no'!" came the reply.

"Well, then, she damnt soon will pe whateffer!" retorted Iain Gearr, as he proceeded to stick his dirk deep into the moving thing beneath the plaid.

An agonising scream now reverberated along the cavernous shore of Ardnamurchan. On removing the plaid to make sure that the old woman was *quite* dead this time, Iain discovered that what he had dirked was a large otter which had concealed itself in the folds of the plaid. Re-assured that his mother was really dead, he and his attendants hurried on their journey, anxious to commit the remains to earth ere any other weird experiences befell them.

The folks of Ardnamurchan still point to the stones

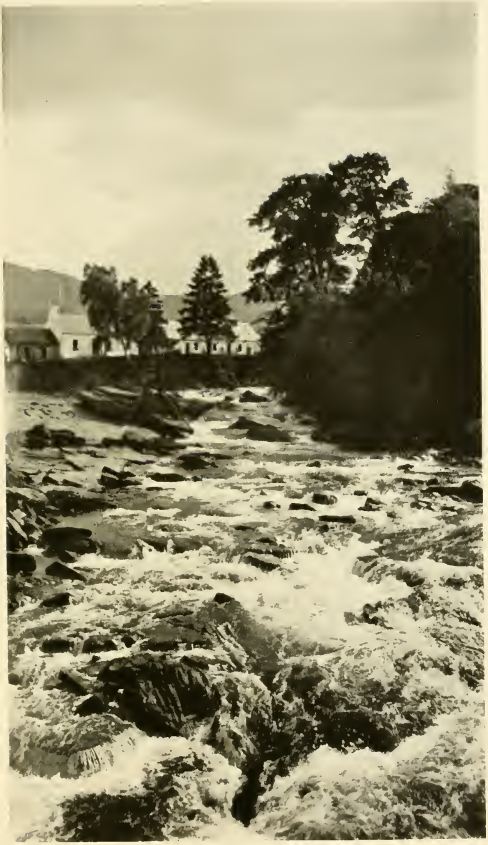
marking the graves at Kilchoan of Iain Gearr and his kindred. These stones consist of slabs of slate, on which Celtic designs have been wrought. They lie side by side; and there is a tradition in Argyll that Iain Gearr brought them from Iona to mark the graves of his father and mother.

The Valour of Calum Mòr MacVurich.

There is an ancient tradition in Colonsay that the Balnahard district of that island was once occupied by a sept of the Clan Grant, which suddenly was extirpated. Nothing thereafter was ever heard of these Grants, except that an old woman of the lost sept was discovered on the summit of Ben Cruachan without her tongue. The enemy (so the tradition goes) did not put her to death, but cut out her tongue instead, in order to prevent her telling what had befallen her clans-people.

The Grants were followed at Balnahard by a clan of the name of Bell, sixteen of whom, according to another tradition current in Colonsay, took part in the skirmish against the MacLeans of Duart known as the Battle of Deabhaidh. The story goes that the MacLeans swept down on the Colonsay folks and their cattle, taking them unawares when they were busy at the peats. The men of Colonsay put up what resistance they could with the only weapons at their disposal—the peat-spades. These they used dexterously, until many of their number were killed by the invader. Eventually, however, men from a neighbouring clan, bearing arms, came to their succour, and turned the fortunes of the day in favour of the men of Colonsay.

Then there arrived on the scene from Balnahard the sixteen men of the Clan Bell, aforementioned, who came in warlike demeanour to join issue with the MacLeans. They came unshaven, "probably under the impression," as one writer puts it, "that thereby they would obtain strength like Samson." In the bitter struggle that ensued, fifteen Bells were slain. The only member of their clan, who escaped with his life, is said to have lost an arm and a leg.



The brawling Dochart at Killin, Perthshire.

[*Facing P.* 208

Effigy of one of the Chiefs of the MacLeods of Lewis, affixed to the South Wall of St. Columba's, at Aignish, Isle of Lewis.

[*See P.* 204

[*Facing P.* 209

Though forced to retire before the onslaught of the MacLeans, the men of Colonsay were able to convey with them to safety the surviving Bell. But their plight was little worse than that of the rieving MacLeans, whose numbers were now reduced to eight, and who likewise were unable to consolidate any temporary success they may have gained. The surviving MacLeans withdrew to the east shore of Loch Fada. There they lay down in the heather; and, little imagining that there was any likelihood of their being assailed, they spent the evening in washing and binding their wounds, and the dark hours in heavy sleep, without even the safeguard of a sentry.

When the news ran through Colonsay that the enemy had been obliged to retire, a certain valiant inhabitant, Calum Mòr MacVurich to name, rose from a bed of sickness, and in scriptural fashion girded his loins. Alone, but well armed, he set off for Loch Fada before dawn. In the first faint flush of morning, he noticed something glittering by the other side of the loch. On closer investigation he discovered this to be the arms of the eight surviving MacLeans, piled up among the heather in military style, and quite close to the rough-and-ready encampment they had devised for themselves. Within the encampment lay the MacLeans, all of them apparently asleep; and with his sword Calum Mòr slew or disabled every one of them. Before he quitted the scene, it is said, breath remained in not one of the MacLeans.

The folks of Colonsay, who knew of Calum's expedition, despaired of his return from Loch Fada, for they regarded him as being far too ill to engage in any serious conflict with any hope of surviving it. Imagine their astonishment, therefore, when he returned to announce that he had vanquished the enemy to a man!

To this day the spot where this incident occurred is referred to by the people of Colonsay as Murder Hollow. The bodies of the eight marauding MacLeans put to the sword by Calum Mòr MacVurich were buried in the burial-ground of Kilmory, at Kiloran, within sight of the last scene they witnessed in *this* life.

The name of Calum Mòr is still revered on the Island of

Colonsay. The natives regard him as the warrior who, in a time far distant, saved their forbears from extinction.

Now, there is in Colonsay a small depression, in which stands a *carnan,* or little heap of stones, the site of which commands a *bealach,* or mountain-pass, some little distance beyond. The sixteen men of the Clan Bell are said to have passed by this cairn and through this pass when on their way to engage the enemy at Deabhaidh. Later in the day a large contingent of Bells followed them in this airt from Balnahard. But they were too late for the fight. All was over ere they reached the scene. Because of this, they were held up to contempt, and became known thereafter as the *Late* Bells. In order to differentiate between them and the *Early* Bells, the folks of Colonsay devised that, whenever any of the former passed through the *bealach,* they had to keep to the east side of the cairn, whereas the track passing on the west side was reserved for the families and descendants of the men who were in time for the fight.

A Folk-Tale of Rothiemurchus.

The last folk-tale of rieving I propose telling you is located in Rothiemurchus.

Northward from Loch Einich and the northern foot-hills of the Cairngorms, Glen Einich runs towards Rothiemurchus; and steeply through this glen falls an impetuous stream to join the River Druie, which, in turn, joins the Spey between Inverdruie and Aviemore. In Glen Einich there are two bothies, which are said to have been bequeathed to the people of the neighbourhood by a Grant of Rothiemurchus in remembrance of his mother, who gave him birth while on a visit to her clanswomen then attending the summer shielings. One bothy is situated by a track close to the northern shore of Loch Einich : the other is to be found a couple of miles or so farther down the glen, and not far from a lochan known by a Gaelic name signifying the Loch of the Swift Lad's Son.

The donor of the bothies made it a condition of his beneficence that they should always contain a certain amount

of food, and be maintained in a tolerable state of repair, such as would enable any traveller to spend a night at them in reasonable comfort.

And now to the folk-tale still told at winter ceilidhs in Badenoch, describing how the Loch of the Swift Lad's Son came by its name.

As the bowman of Rothiemurchus was tending the cattle by the fringe of this loch one Sabbath day, he caught sight of a band of men moving among the hills afar off, and in the airt of the mountain-track long since known as the Cattle-lifters' Road. He soon recognised them to be Lochaber cattle-rievers making for the grazings over which roamed the herds belonging to his master, Grant of Rothiemurchus. Realising that there was no time to be lost, he instantly dropped down into the valley, and dashed off with all speed to the Church of Rothiemurchus, wherein most of the local folks were worshipping. Immediately the bowman announced the approach of the Lochaber caterans, the service was suspended. Every mother's son of fighting age now began to feel for his *sgian-dubh* (dirk). To a man, they dashed up through the pine forests, following, as best they could, the bowman, who was named the Son of the Swift Lad, and who was fleeter of foot than any of them. But the bowman's very fleetness was his undoing, since he found himself alone and at grips with the rievers before his clansmen were able to make up on him. Against great odds he fought valiantly. But the caterans wore him down, and slew him. His corpse they buried before his clansmen came on the scene, and even before they had arrived within sight of the spot where they interred him.

When, eventually, the men of Rothiemurchus overtook the rievers, they retrieved their cattle without the loss of another life. But nowhere to be seen, either dead or alive, was the nimble-footed Son of the Swift Lad. Time passed; and the mystery of his fate remained unsolved. And it was not until some considerable time later that a Lochaber woman, in passing through Rothiemurchus, disclosed to the natives the circumstances of the bowman's death, and the secret place of his burial, thus enabling his

kinsfolk to unearth his corpse and convey it to decent burial in the old kirkyard at Rothiemurchus.

Ever since that time, the loch lying close to the scene of the tragedy has gone by a Gaelic name denoting it as the Loch of the Swift Lad's Son; and the discovery of a dirk near this loch some years ago would seem to be confirmation of this tale of cattle-rieving times.

CHAPTER XVIII

FOLK-TALES OF DOUGHTY MEN AND DOUGHTY DEEDS

IN an age of comparative lawlessness, when the inhabitants of the Highlands trusted in the ancient right of the sword rather than in reason, and lived day-to-day lives in face of want and violence, it is scarcely surprising that there should have occurred innumerable incidents affording opportunities for valour, and reflecting in the folk-tales of the people a respect for the valorous, amounting often to hero-worship, and sometimes even to a form of idolatry. So far as the Highlands are concerned, perhaps the classical incidents are those associated with Rob Roy. The Islands, on the other hand, had their own particular warrior in the person of Donald Cam MacAulay, some of whose doughty exploits, as recorded in island folk-tale, are described in the following pages.

Folk-tales, such as that connected with the gorge in Glen Lyon known as MacGregor's Leap (from the repetition of which I have spared you in these pages!), are to be heard all over the Highlands where there exists anything in the nature of a deep chasm sufficiently wide to make it highly improbable that any ordinary person could clear it safely. Similarly distributed are folk-tales describing the rescue or destruction of heirs, and of the dexterity of swordsmen and archers. With the reputed achievements of some of the archers, so far as they have been recorded in folk-tale, I have dealt in an earlier chapter.

Black Roderic Challenges Rob Roy.

No warrior was there in all Scotland more dexterous in the mystery of swordsmanship than Black Roderic, one of the Chiefs of the MacNeils of Barra. Having heard that a similar claim had been made for Rob Roy, Black Roderic

aspired to "try" the Red MacGregor. Whereat he journeyed southward from the Hebrides, with this object in view. When he arrived at Loch Lomondside, he learnt that Rob Roy had gone off to a fair at Killearn. Off went the Chief of Barra in quest of him; and, when nearing Killearn, he met a number of men on horseback, who were just returning from the fair. Accosting one of them, Black Roderic made inquiries as to the whereabouts of Rob Roy.

"He is here," replied the horseman who had been accosted; "and what will you be wanting with him?"

"Well," explained the MacNeil, "I am the Chief of Barra; and they are telling me that you consider yourself a better swordsman than I am. So, I have come all this way to prove that you are not!"

"Though I have little desire to fight a man without just cause," cried Rob Roy, dismounting the while, "I shall accept your challenge; and, though you be a stranger to me, you shall not go without your deserts."

Only on one occasion was Rob Roy MacGregor known to have declined a challenge. The challenge on that occasion came from a certain Donald Bain; and MacGregor's reason for his having declined was that he fought duels only with gentlemen.

Without further ado, Black Roderic and Rob Roy set to. Now, Rob Roy was notorious both for the length and the strength of his arms. So long were they, indeed, that, when he stood erect, his finger-tips touched his garters. Hence he wielded the claymore to some purpose. Scarcely had the duel began when the Chief of Barra found reason to regret his temerity, since his antagonist nearly took his sword arm off him with one fell swipe, thus necessitating his detention in the village of Killearn for several months.

In due course Black Roderic returned to Barra; and never again was he putting trouble on Rob Roy.

Black Roderic and the Warrior of Sealltuinn.

This same Black Roderic, who sometimes was known as Black Roderic the Unjust, also went on an expedition to Sealltuinn (Shetland); and the folk-tale is still told in the

Isles of how he arrived there in an eight-oared galley, fully manned, and provoked the Warrior of Sealltuinn to mortal combat, and threatened to take tribute from him.

Now, there was numbered among Roderic's crew a widow's son of prodigious strength. He had been reared in Kisimul Castle; and he was the mightiest of MacNeil's men-at-arms. Jealous, to be sure, was Black Roderic that his Castle should house a man stronger than he; and, therefore, he laid many a scheme designed to get rid of the widow's son.

Before the duel commenced with the Warrior of Sealltuinn, Black Roderic had said to the widow's son: "When you see me taking a step back in the fight, you will know I am growing weak. When you see me looking back once, the fight will be going against me. When I look back a second time, you will realise that I am exhausted, and will expect you to step into my place. And, if you finish the fight successfully, we shall divide the spoil of Sealltuinn."

When MacNeil could sustain the fight no longer, he gave an eye over his shoulder a second time, whereupon the widow's son stepped into the breach. After he and the Warrior had been sparring for some time, Black Roderic, impatient for the death of the latter, called out to the widow's son: "Give the Warrior the end he deserves!" And in a trice the severed head of the Warrior of Sealltuinn lay on the ground.

When the widow's son realised that he had slain an opponent, whom he intended merely to wound, he turned to Black Roderic, who had incited him, and said: "You son of the other man! You I blame for the death of the innocent; and, if you and your crew do not take your feet out of here and put them in the galley, there will not be a live man among you. Spoil you shall not 'lift' in these Islands, for *I* now am the laird of Sealltuinn."

Black Roderic and his men, therefore, beat a hasty retreat to their galley, for the widow's son had put the fear of death on them.

And that is how a MacNeil first found his way to the Northern Isles; and there are descendants of him in Sealltuinn to this day.

Rob Roy's Promise to MacAlpine.

The folk-tale about the duel fought by Rob Roy and Black Roderic the Unjust recalls a tale arising from the fact that the Clan Gregor and the Clan Grant always claimed a kinship dating back to very early times, and to a bond of amity that held them together for many generations. Frequently in time of stress did these clans succour one another.

The story is still recounted in the Highlands of how the Grants, in the time of Rob Roy, were able to call upon their rebellious ally to assist them in rebuffing the MacKintosh. And this is the story. At a time when the Laird of Rothiemurchus, who was known as MacAlpine, had so offended the Chief of the Clan Grant that the latter pledged himself not to assist him, were he to find himself in danger at the instance of any other clan or chief, the MacKintosh sought to pick a quarrel with him. MacAlpine knew quite well that, without the help of the whole of the Clan Grant, he could never prevail against armed aggression on the part of a clan as numerous and powerful as the Clan MacKintosh. But, as it so happened, he had entered into a secret agreement with Rob Roy, whereby the Clan Gregor guaranteed to protect him. Thus it was that, when the MacKintosh threatened to divert the course of a stream running through his own territory, but which thereafter turned the mill-wheel at Rothiemurchus, MacAlpine did not hesitate in writing him a peremptory epistle. So incensed by this was the MacKintosh that he determined to take reprisal by way of marching on the Doune, the ancient family home of the Grants of Rothiemurchus, with the object of setting fire to it. One night, as the MacKintoshes were getting everything in readiness for their sortie, and MacAlpine sat anxiously in the Doune, earnestly waiting for help from the MacGregors, he felt a strong hand on his shoulder. This was the hand of none other than that of Rob Roy.

"Though the purse be empty the night," observed Rob Roy, "it may be full by the morn!"

"But where are your men, Rob?" asked the Laird of Rothiemurchus in agitated tone.

"Leave that to me!" replied the MacGregor; and with that he summoned his piper, whom he directed to march up and down in front of the Doune, playing *MacGregor's Gathering*. As the piper continued to play, groups of MacGregors in twos and threes made their appearance, until at length Rob Roy was surrounded by more than a hundred of the best men of the Clan Gregor. The Highland seannachie relates in connection with this incident that "the piper had orders not to stop playing till all were out, and it nearly burst him!"

Now, as the MacGregors appeared in twos and threes, the MacKintoshes disappeared in fours and fives, until eventually not one of their kind was to be seen anywhere. Finally, Rob Roy sent to the MacKintosh a communication in the Gaelic, warning him that, if ever it came to his ears that he was interfering in any way with MacAlpine, or trespassing feloniously within the confines of Rothiemurchus, he would send through the MacKintosh's country a band of picked men with fire and sword.

As Rob Roy was taking leave of MacAlpine, he made the observation that it was a far cry to the country of the MacGregors, and that probably none of MacAlpine's followers knew the shortest route. Rob, therefore, left behind him at the Doune two MacGregors, who were noted for their fleetness of foot, and who were to be sent forth to fetch him in the event of any further trouble with the MacKintosh.

This story had an interesting sequel when one of the MacGregors left at the Doune fell in love with, and married, MacAlpine's natural daughter, Mary of the Yellow Locks. Since MacAlpine himself was strongly opposed to the match, the couple was obliged to seek concealment in a remote part of Rothiemurchus. When, some years later, MacAlpine was on a solitary tour of inspection of his estate, he lost his way. Eventually he came upon a humble bothy; and Mary, recognising him, quickly apprised her husband, so that he was able to hide in the surrounding pine-woods for which Rothiemurchus is famous. MacAlpine duly

entered the bothy. Mary received him graciously. She gave him food and drink; and, as he sat warming himself before her fire, he said to her: "Noo fetch me the guidman's heid in yer apron, ma lassie!"

"Na, na, Laird!" replied Mary of the Yellow Locks, "I've ower mony heids at ma fireside for me tae spare ye *his* heid!"

"Hoot, lassie," continued MacAlpine, "gae awa' and bid him come in!"

So Mary went to the door, and called her husband. In a moment he and MacAlpine had patched up their difference; and MacAlpine had bestowed upon him one of the best farms in Rothiemurchus. For generations thereafter the MacGregors remained as faithful tenants and servants of successive lairds of Rothiemurchus.

In the year, 1890, there died at the Doune Square an old man named Hamish MacGregor, the last descendant in the locality of the two MacGregors whom Rob Roy left with MacAlpine.

MacAlpine, it is said, prayed till his dying day for two men only. One was the Duke of Gordon: Rob Roy was the other.

MacNicol's Leap.

At Dun Othail, in the Isle of Lewis, there is a ravine sheering down to the Minch known as MacNicol's Leap. With this ravine is associated one of the several folk-tales current throughout the Highlands and Islands of the manner in which some valiant fellow, usually when pursued, managed to escape the vengeance of his foes by leaping across some yawning chasm, leaving his foes behind, bewildered, and unable to follow. The following story is one of the many describing how MacNicol's Leap came by its name.

For an offence, the nature of which tradition does not specify, a chief of Lewis sentenced one MacNicol to death by violence. MacNicol, in retaliation, fled with the chief's only child. Pursued by the chief's retainers, he sprang across the chasm at Dun Othail, bearing the infant heir in his arms. All attempts to circumvent MacNicol having

failed, methods of peaceful persuasion were resorted to in the hope of inducing him to restore the child to its parents. MacNicol, however, would not listen to the chief until such time as the latter gave him complete remission for the offence alleged against him. The chief yielded eventually; and MacNicol, when he saw that he had gained his point, shouted aloud in the Gaelic: "*I* shall have no heir: neither will *he!*" Thereupon he lept over the cliffs of Dun Othail into the sea, taking the child with him to certain death.

A folk-tale very similar is told of a place in South Uist, and also of a place at Glen Elg. And here is the story as it still is recounted in Mull.

Gorrie's Leap.

Located near Carsaig, on the Isle of Mull, is Gorrie's Leap. Gorrie was one of the retainers of MacLaine of Lochbuie; and he had been instructed by the chief of that sept to prevent the deer from escaping through a certain ravine during a deer-drive on his territory. Hard as Gorrie strove to comply with his chief's instructions, several deer eluded him and made their way to safety. The chief now decided to punish Gorrie for his incompetence; but Gorrie, greatly dreading such punishment, snatched Lochbuie's heir from the arms of his nurse, and leapt with him over a chasm among the rocks at the spot to this day known as Gorrie's Leap.

Since none of Gorrie's pursuers dared venture to cross, and since Lochbuie was now reduced to utter despair for the life of his heir, the latter was obliged to concede to Gorrie's terms that the heir would be returned to him, unscaithed, on condition that Lochbuie abandoned any intention of inflicting harm on Gorrie.

Whether Gorrie mistrusted the word of MacLaine or not, we have no means of knowing. But it would appear as though he did, when he leapt from the ledge of rock to his destruction in the dark chasm below, carrying the infant Lochbuie with him.

And they say in Mull that, at misty and mysterious twilight, echoes may be heard of the shrieks emitted by Gorrie in his death-leap.

The Rescue of an Heir.

And this brings to mind the next folk-tale.

To the west of Mull lies a group of small islands called the Treshnish Isles. These islands, though remote and seldom visited by humans, are not without interest. Two of them—to wit, Carnburg Mòr and Carnburg Beag—were fortified in olden times. About the year, 1695, when Martin Martin toured the Hebrides, the stronghold on Carnburg Mòr was considered impregnable. It was held by a "small garrison of the standing forces"; and there is a tradition in the Highlands that, at the time of the Reformation, the numberless books of the monastery library of Iona were transferred to Carnburg Mòr, and there secreted in the ground, where perhaps they still await discovery!

The story is told of a bitter dissension that at one time arose between MacLaine of Lochbuie and the Chief of the MacLeans of Duart. In the hope of ensuring that MacLaine of Lochbuie would have no heir, the Chief banished him to Carnburg Mòr, and kept him thereon in close confinement, with no one to look after him but an old woman. Not many months had elapsed when it was discovered that the old woman was with child. This incensed MacLean of Duart, who instantly ordered her removal to Mull, and her retention there in close captivity until after the birth of her child. When her time drew near, the Chief gave instructions to the mid-wife that, if the child were a male, he was to be killed. His anxiety was greatly relieved, therefore, when the mid-wife announced that a female child had been born, whose life he could have no purpose in taking.

But an hour or so later the woman gave birth to another child—a son and heir! Secretly, and in the dead of night, this child was smuggled away to a cave among the mountains of Mull. There it was protected from all harm by a man and his six stalwart sons, who were loyal partisans of the MacLaines of Lochbuie.

In course of time it became bruited about that, somewhere in concealment on the Island of Mull, there was a baby heir

to Lochbuie. MacLean of Duart now organised a search. When his men came upon the father and his six sons, they threatened them with death if they did not disclose the child's whereabouts. They refused; and were duly slain. Meanwhile the infant had been hurried away to the care of another guardian; and soon afterwards Duart felt obliged to abandon his search. To this day the spot is pointed out by the River Lussa where the father and sons were slain by Duart's men. It is called *Airidh na Sliseig,* Shieling of the Slashing.

When Lochbuie's heir was approaching man's estate, his mother told him of his lineage, and advised him to quit Mull if he valued his personal safety. This he did. For a twelvemonth he remained in Ireland, gathering round him twelve trusty followers, to whom he explained his circumstance, and his desire to recover his patrimony from the MacLeans of Duart, by fair means or by foul. And it was resolved that, under his direction, a small band should set out for Mull with a view to taking the ancient castle of the MacLaines, down by the shores of Loch Buie. They duly took the castle; and thus the MacLaines of Lochbuie returned to enjoy their heritage.

Swordsmanship in the Isles.

Few islands in all Scotland are richer in folk-tales than Berneray, in the Sound of Harris. The story is told of two brothers named MacLeod, who put forward a legal claim to part of the parent Island of Harris. This the Laird of MacLeod would not recognise. But so insistent were the claimants that in the end he let it be known that he would seek reprisals on their property, and possibly also on their persons, if they did not renounce their claim. A compromise was arrived at eventually, whereby the Laird offered the brothers two excellent farms at a nominal rental. One brother then approached the Laird with the offer that he would advance him a little ready cash he had saved, if in return he might be installed in the farm of Risgarry, in Berneray. To this the Laird agreed. The other brother

accepted the smaller farm at Scarista, on the mainland of Harris.

All went so well for a time that the Laird believed harmony now had displaced the animosities which had existed for years between the brothers, as well as between their respective families. Yet, all the time the sons of the brother now renting Scarista harboured suspicions as to how their uncle and cousins had acquired the superior farm of Risgarry. When they discovered that a sum of money actually had been paid by their uncle to the Laird of Harris, and at the very time negotiations for a settlement were being entered into, they resolved, with their father's connivance, to sail over to Berneray, put uncle and cousins out of the way, and take possession of their property. They disembarked on Berneray at dead of night, laid siege to their uncle's house, and killed all the family, with the exception of their eldest cousin, John MacLeod, who was away from home at the time, and whose strength and swordsmanship the Scarista invaders dreaded.

Father and sons now conspired to waylay John as he came home in the morning, when he was least likely to be prepared for a fight. It was arranged that the father, clad as he was in a coat of mail, would engage his nephew, while the sons would remain in concealment near at hand. In accordance with programme, John MacLeod, on his return to Berneray in the morning, was accosted by his evil uncle, who did not hesitate to tell him that not one of his kinsmen had survived the previous night's massacre, and that he himself was about to experience a similar fate. Against the sword of his uncle, poor John had neither shield nor armour wherewith to defend himself. Yet, in the duel that ensued he drove his uncle to give ground all the while, and finally thrust him through. At nightfall he swam across to Uist, and sought shelter at the hands of a foster-brother, who was instrumental in having him ferried over to Nunton, in Benbecula, the seat of another uncle, Clan Ranald of the Isles. Under Clan Ranald's roof John MacLeod remained for a twelvemonth.

Eventually MacLeod of Harris, together with several petty lairds acknowledging him as their superior, set sail in

the birlinns for Benbecula. On arrival, they sent a message to Clan Ranald that, if he did not deliver John MacLeod to them, " for that he was a terror to the surrounding clans," they would take reprisals before quitting his estates. On receiving this ultimatum, Clan Ranald, somewhat faithless to the traditions of his forbears in similar circumstances, gave notice to MacLeod of Harris and his allies that *he* would offer no resistance to their apprehending his nephew at Nunton, if they cared to do so. Quite unaware was John MacLeod that he was being betrayed, until he was apprised by a member of Clan Ranald's household. Enraged by this treachery, he straightway went to his uncle, and asked him for the use of a sword. This he obtained, and immediately directed a violent thrust at his betrayer, who, already suspicious that his nephew had sensed the plot, stepped aside in time to save himself.

" You are not worthy of my steel," said MacLeod, as he left Clan Ranald's house in disgust to give himself up to MacLeod of Harris and his followers, who in the meanwhile were close at hand.

They say in the Isles that, when the Laird and his allies returned to Harris with their prisoner, they revelled for several days, celebrating their achievement. But, despite all promises made by the Laird, John MacLeod was sent captive to Dunvegan, where he lay in close confinement for a year and a day.

John MacLeod and the Italian Swordsman.

Yet another Berneray folk-tale concerns John MacLeod and his swordsmanship.

There came to Rodil an Italian who, in travelling through Scotland, had challenged and vanquished her best swordsmen. In those days it was customary for such warriors to levy a cess on every laird and commoner, if the laird of their particular district were unable to bring forth a man who could stand up to him.

So incensed was MacLeod of Harris at the demands made upon his people by this Italian swordsman, that he

sent to Berneray for John MacLeod, urging him to find his way over to Rodil without delay.

"I will give him the choice of my swords," said the Laird, "if he engage the Italian. And, what's more, if he beat him, I will settle him on new lands."

MacLeod readily accepted the challenge of the Italian, whose repute and warlike aspect hitherto had alarmed the Highlands. Thereupon the Laird of Harris took both swordsmen into his armoury, and invited them to choose whatever weapons they fancied. The contestants engaged each other furiously; but the Italian proved no match whatever for the superior dexterity of John MacLeod, who easily vanquished him.

The Laird of Harris now sought to implement his promise of lands. But it is said that MacLeod, indignant that the Italian should also have been given a choice of sword from the armoury, handed back the weapon he himself had chosen, and told the Laird that never again would he be disposed to free him or his clans-people from the exactions of any challenging warrior touring the Highlands. Thereafter John MacLeod sailed across the Minch. He landed at Assynt, where he soon put himself in possession of certain lands. A little later, he set out for Harris to collect his family and belongings; but they say in Berneray that, when only a gunshot from the Assynt shore, he fell overboard and was drowned.

Black was the sorrow among MacLeod's kinsfolk, and also among his many admirers throughout the Isles, when they learned of his death. His corpse was recovered by the seashore of the lands he had acquired in Assynt; and it was interred at a spot near by.

A Renowned Swordsman.

In bygone days the Isle of Skye had a renowned swordsman in the person of the tacksman of Greshornish. On one occasion this swordsman accepted, for a wager, the challenge to combat by an Englishman, who at the time happened to be the guest of Lady MacLeod at Dunvegan Castle. On his way across the moors—there were no roads

in the days with which we are dealing—to meet his antagonist at Dunvegan, the Greshornish swordsman tried his hand on every object that beset his path, beheading every reed and bulrush that came within the ambit of his claymore. Nervous was his servant, however, lest by the time he reached the Castle he should be too weary to stand up to his opponent; but all fears were soon dispelled when, to his astonishment, his master clove in two a bumble-bee that chanced to pass before him. On their arrival at Dunvegan, Lady MacLeod brought forth her guest. Without any preliminaries, the combat commenced in the presence of many of the Dunvegan people. But scarcely had it begun when Greshornish flicked a button out of the Sassenach's shirt with the point of his sword. A second or two later, he removed the Englishman's collar-stud in like manner.

"Now look out for the third time!" said Greshornish, whereupon MacLeod of MacLeod prevailed upon his Lady to take her friend away while he was yet a living man. This she immediately did. Thus the fight terminated ere any blood was shed. The MacLeods lost their wager on this occasion; and Greshornish returned to his home in great exultation, and with yet another laurel.

The Bumpering of Rory Mor's Horn.

Mention of Dunvegan recalls the stories of prowess associated with the drinking-horn of Sir Rory MacLeod of Dunvegan, commonly known in Highland history as Rory Mòr. According to one tradition, the horn itself was taken from the head of a wild bull slain in the woods of Glen Elg by Malcolm, third Chief of the MacLeods of Dunvegan. From this incident is said to have originated both the bull's head caboshed between two flags, which is the crest of the MacLeods, and their device, "Hold Fast." According to another tradition concerning the origin of the horn, MacLeod of MacLeod had gone to Inveraray, where he found within a fenced arena a young man whom Argyll had condemned to be gored to death by a bull. MacLeod remarked to Argyll that his victim was far too fine a fellow

to be killed. To his pleadings that his life should be spared, however, Argyll turned a deaf ear.

"Will you give him to me, if I save him?" asked MacLeod.

"Yes, but you, too, go to your death!" retorted Argyll.

Thereupon MacLeod sprang into the arena, and seized the enraged bull by the horns. "Hold Fast!" shouted the onlookers, as MacLeod buried his dirk in the bull's heart, and lopped off one of its horns.

I am told that to this day there is in Dunvegan a family of Campbells claiming descend from the young man whom MacLeod so valiantly rescued.

The horn is a large ox horn, rimmed with a deep silver band, on which is engraved a familiar Celtic interlacing design. In ancient days every young heir, on succeeding to the chiefship, was required to prove his worth by draining in one breath the full content of this horn. In times more temperate, this ordeal was considerably mitigated by the insertion within the horn of a wooden lining. To-day the bumpering of Rory Mòr's horn is entirely discontinued.

The Exploits of Donald Cam MacAulay.

No book of this kind would be complete without some reference to the exploits of Donald Cam MacAulay; and here is the Lewis version of the folk-tale describing how that famous warrior and a number of his henchmen took the ancient Pictish broch known as Dun Carloway.

One summer, while Donald Cam and the Big Smith were absent on a fowling expedition at the Flannan Isles, the Morrisons of Ness invaded Uig, the western parish of Lewis and the heritage of the MacAulays, and drove off some of the MacAulays' cattle. Upon the return of the fowling party, the women-folk described the way in which the Morrisons had forayed the pastures of Uig. Instantly the MacAulays set off in a boat across Loch Roag, in the hope of overtaking the rieving Morrisons. By the shore of a lochan near Dun Carloway they found their cattle grazing. This seemed to indicate that the Morrisons themselves were within the Dun.

That night the MacAulays decided to rest by the lochan. But there was a great hunger on them. So Donald Cam and the Big Smith went forth in the dark in search of food. When nearing Dun Carloway, they observed a huge cauldron on the fire, and a man lying asleep by the side of it. The cauldron contained the carcase of a beast, of which the Morrisons had just robbed the MacAulays. So, while the Big Smith seized hold of the man lying by the fire, and muffled him lest his shouting should be heard by those within the Dun, Donald Cam drew the meat out of the cauldron, wrapped it in his plaid, and carried it down to his famishing clansmen by the shore of the lochan. Tradition adds that the Big Smith disposed of the cook by having pitched him into the cauldron after the meat had been extracted.

Donald Cam and the Big Smith and a band of MacAulays thereafter closed in on Dun Carloway. At the entrance to the fort Donald Cam slew the sentry; and there he posted the Big Smith, that he might prevent the escape of a single inmate. Then Donald Cam himself scrambled up the tapering walls of the Dun with the help of two dirks, until he came to the top. This he found to be covered by a large, flat *leac* or slab. He now directed his men to pull tufts of dry heather, and make them into large bundles. Having pushed aside the slab, he threw these bundles into the interior of the Dun. He then set fire to the heather, and smothered or burnt all the occupants of Dun Carloway. Shortly after this, the MacAulays commenced to dismantle the old Dun, which, according to tradition, was built in the fourth century by a giant named Darg Mac Nuaṛan.

Treachery Avenged.

In the Kyles of Pabbay, and roughly midway between the village of Valtos, in Uig, and the Isle of Vacsay, lies Siaram. To this small isle Torquil Dubh MacLeod had sallied forth to snare rabbits among the sand-dunes fringing the sea. While thus engaged, there was brought to him from John Morrison, Hereditary Brieve of Lewis, a request that he and Donald Cam MacAulay, together with a limited

number of their supporters, should attend a banquet aboard a foreign vessel that Morrison deponed to have captured, and that in the meantime rode at anchor within earshot of the Port of Ness. In good faith they accepted the invitation.

When the guests got aboard the foreign vessel, on which they expected to enjoy a feast at the Brieve's expense, they deposited their arms on deck in accordance with custom, and proceeded to seat themselves round the cabin. Unbeknown to them, the cable was slipped and the ship allowed to drift out into the open sea. Before long she began to roll so heavily that Donald Cam felt compelled to investigate matters. On getting up on deck, he discovered that the vessel had crossed a considerable part of the Minch. He yelled to Torquil Dubh that they had been tricked by the Brieve; and on rushing to the spot where, on embarkation, he and his followers had laid their arms, he found that these had been removed. A fierce mêlée ensued —the would-be hosts armed, and the unsuspecting guests defenceless. John Mòr MacKay, a redoubtable Islesman who lived at a township called Bragair, sprang at Donald Cam, and held him while his confederates lashed him to the mast. Half a dozen ruffians set on poor Torquil Dubh, and succeeded in binding him hand and foot. The ship adjusted her bearings for Ullapool. On arrival there, the prisoners were taken ashore. To a large block weighing eleven Dutch stones, Donald Cam and his son-in-law, Alasdair Little-heel MacLeod, were fettered by a ponderous chain. But, as they sat brooding over their misfortunes, Alasdair suddenly remembered that one of his feet was considerably smaller than the other. As luck had it, the smaller foot was in the fetter. With no great difficulty, Alasdair Little-heel manipulated his foot in such a way as to release it from the chain. He then helped to place block and chain on the broad shoulders of Donald Cam; and both decamped.

For a day and a half they prowled through the woods lining the seaboard of Wester Ross. At times they ventured down to the shore in the hope of finding a boat in which they might effect an escape. Boats they found

galore, drawn up above high-water mark, and lying upside-down. Not a single oar lay about them. And so Donald Cam and Alasdair Little-heel wandered on and on, until they came to Applecross. At Applecross they alighted upon an old, clinker-built coble so leaky that they had to line the seams between the planks with clay. From the wooden gate of a fank near by, they removed two bars. These they converted into oars. With no high expectation, they embarked in the leaky coble for Skye. Miserable all the time was Donald Cam by reason of the weight of the block and chain he carried—so miserable, in sooth, that they had proceeded less than halfway across the Inner Sound when he gave up rowing and baling, and threw himself down in despair at the stern.

But Alasdair Little-heel was not for losing heart. Alternately he rowed and baled, until at length he brought the coble ashore at Loch Follart, immediately below Dunvegan Castle. Kindly hands received the fugitives at Dunvegan. The hereditary blacksmith to MacLeod of MacLeod was summoned from his home at Suardal, a couple of miles away, to remove the irksome chain that was fastened round the neck and leg of poor Donald Cam.

Now, the iron chain and block may be seen to this day in the dungeon at Dunvegan Castle, where they bear testimony to the courage and endurance of two fugitives who came over from Applecross in a leaking boat propelled by improvised oars.

* * * * *

After a short period of recuperation at Dunvegan Alasdair Little-heel and Donald Cam MacAulay crossed the Minch, and eventually found their way back to Uig, *via* Harris. Extraordinary was the rejoicing in the west of Lewis on the return of the warriors whom everyone had given up as dead.

Scarcely a week had John Mòr MacKay and John Morrison, the Brieve, returned to Lewis from Ullapool when they learnt that their enemies had escaped, and were at large in Uig once again. Realising that an attack by the MacAulays was inevitable, they prepared to defend them-

selves. While John Mòr MacKay sought to fortify himself in a ruined broch standing in a sheet of fresh water called Loch an Duna, and known as Dun Bragair, the Brieve of Lewis was eagerly enlisting the support of the hardiest Morrisons of Ness.

Donald Cam, bent on vengeance, summoned twelve of the best swordsmen in Uig, and charged them to bring to him John Mòr MacKay, dead or alive! With a sense of the magnitude of their task, the twelve set out for Dun Bragair. In the dead of night they reached the shore of Loch an Duna, procured a boat, rowed across the loch to the *dun,* and surprised MacKay in bed. John Mòr closed with his opponents; but eventually he was overpowered and bound. At dawn the twelve MacAulays set out for Uig with their prisoner. And the seannachie tells of how John Mòr MacKay, when being escorted across the River Grimersta at a point not far from Linshader, put a number of his captors out of action, and nearly succeeded in escaping.

Without delay he was conveyed to Kirkibost, on the Great Bernera, wherefrom a messenger was despatched to Donald Cam, to acquaint him with the success that had attended the adventure at Dun Bragair of his twelve chosen swordsmen. And on the morrow there convened at Kirkibost all the folks of Uig capable of journeying thither; and among them was Donald Cam MacAulay, himself. And the people of Uig decreed unanimously that MacKay should die that very day, and that on his body every man possessing a sword should test the sharpness of the same. So MacKay was brought forth to a knoll still called the Hillock of Ill-Advice (*Cnocan na mi-Chomhairle*). But, when the MacAulays of Uig proceeded to attack him with their swords, they discovered that, like Macbeth and the gods of classical times, he was invulnerable to the weapons of men.

As long as his adversaries knew not wherein his strength lay, so long did John Mòr MacKay prevail against them. It was suggested, however, that the men of Uig should remove the turf from under MacKay's feet. This was done; and immediately MacKay's strength left him, and he became

weak, and like any other man. The charm was dispelled. No longer was he invincible: no longer was he invulnerable to the swords of men.

Thus perished John Mòr MacKay at the hands of the MacAulays of Uig: thus avenged were Donald Cam and his son-in-law, Alasdair Little-heel.

Adrift in an Oarless Boat.

And now to another Lewis tale I propose including in this chapter. It, too, concerns Donald Cam; and I reproduce it here just as it appears in my book, *Searching the Hebrides with a Camera.*

During the years that the invincible Donald Cam MacAulay was obliged to conceal himself among the most inaccessible parts of the Hebrides, he was accompanied by a young man called Dark John of the Large Fist, who, as it were, acted as his personal attendant. Although Dark John had not the strength to wield the broadsword as could his master, Donald Cam respected the lad because he could keep him at bay with the small sword. Sometimes Donald Cam and his attendant took refuge in ruined *duns* that they refortified, sometimes in caverns high up among the Mountains of Uig or of Harris, sometimes on islets situated in lakes. For a time they entrenched in a *dun* on an islet in Loch Bharabhat, a small lake on the moors only a few miles from the storm-beach at Aird Uig. The ruins of an ancient fort are still to be seen on this islet, as are also the unsubmerged portions of the stone causeway leading out to it.

Donald Cam MacAulay and Dark John of the Large Fist maintained themselves on Loch Bharabhat for many a day, living chiefly on fish and venison. By the shores of the open Atlantic at Gallan Head they had a boat so cleverly hidden that no foe ever was able to locate it.

On a boisterous day that there was, they put out to sea, to fish with hand-lines. Through rough water Dark John rowed the boat as best he could, while Donald Cam attended to the lines.

"Pull her ahead!" cried Donald in a moment of

impatience, when he found that the fish were not even nibbling at the bait.

"Stronger I cannot row," replied Dark John; "and what I cannot do, you may do yourself."

In a fit of passion Donald Cam let go the hand-lines, and drew his *sgian-dubh*—the black knife! Instantly Dark John, in order to escape the wrath of his master, pitched both oars overboard, and plunged into the sea himself. For hours he swam against wind and tide; and eventually he came ashore on the storm-beach at Aird Uig. Straightway he made for the retreat in Loch Bharabhat. Having discarded his wet clothing, he tidied the *dun*, kindled a big fire and proceeded to cook great quantities of fish and venison, for he knew well that his resourceful master would be arriving at any moment.

For long enough the Atlantic billows tossed Donald Cam in an oarless boat. At length, however, he recovered one of the oars, and thus was enabled to manoeuvre under difficulties until he came within grasp of the other. By nightfall he had managed to secure both oars. He rowed ashore at Aird Uig, as was his wont, greatly distressed at the loss of his attendant, whom he believed to have been drowned. When he came in sight of Loch Bharabhat, he perceived with great joy that smoke was ascending from the *dun*. On entering, he found the place in readiness for him, a meal prepared, and Dark John seated motionlessly before a roaring fire.

"What made you throw the oars out of the boat yon way, you foolish fellow?" inquired Donald Cam of his attendant.

"The black rage that was on yourself!" replied Dark John.

They smiled one to the other; and never a word more did they utter on the trials and perils of that day.

Having partaken heartily of the meal prepared, Donald Cam and Dark John of the Large Fist fell into deep sleep before the fire.

How the Fletchers lost Achallader.

The story is still recited in Glen Orchy of how the superiority of the lands appertaining to Achallader Castle

The ruined Dun in Loch Bharabhat, with the causeway leading to it—once the retreat of Dark John of the Large Fist and of Donald Cam MacAulay.

The Chain and Block in the Dungeon of Dunvegan Castle that once held Donald Cam and Alasdair Little-heel.

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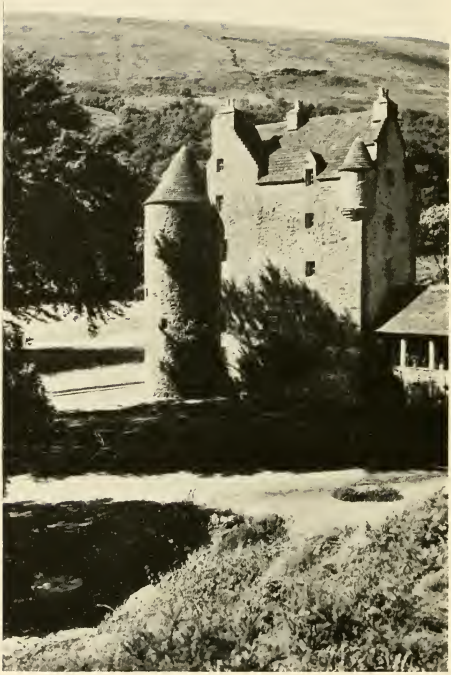

Sunlight and shadow at Dundarave, Loch Fyne—the "Doom Castle" of Neil Munro's celebrated novel.

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passed out of the control of the Fletchers and into the hands of Black Duncan Campbell, the founder of the artful House of Breadalbain, and of how the trickery of the Campbells was the means of urging the Privy Council at Stirling to offer a reward of two hundred merks for the head of the Fletcher Chief. One fine day Black Duncan and three mercenary "strangers" set out on horseback from Finlarig for Achallader Castle, where they observed that Fletcher had an unfenced field of corn, ready for the scythe. Into this field Duncan directed his followers to turn the horses. Indignant, to be sure, was Fletcher, when he descried the trespassers among his corn; but to his remonstrances Black Duncan's men paid no heed. Therefore, in a moment of exasperation, Fletcher hurled a tethering-peg at one of the "strangers," which killed him. Thereupon Black Duncan, who in the interval had been lying in hiding near by, emerged from his concealment, and pretended to exhibit profound consideration for Fletcher, since he (Duncan), in virtue of his appointment by the King, in order to preserve peace and order among the clans then in disaffection, was compelled to discharge the unpleasant duty of bringing to the attention of the Privy Council the heinous crime committed by him.

Eventually, however, it was agreed that, until the hue and cry were over, Fletcher would go into hiding at Rannoch, and that Black Duncan would connive at his offence. That he might avoid the forfeiture of his lands, Black Duncan Campbell counselled him to execute a deed of conveyance in *his* favour, on the understanding that, whenever Fletcher returned to Achallader, the lands would be re-conveyed to him. In the interval Black Duncan, to make the more secure his claim to Fletcher's lands, lodged the document of conveyance in Edinburgh, where it was duly registered in accordance with legal precedent; and, when Fletcher returned from Rannoch, Black Duncan ignored his demand to be reinstated at Achallader.

So that is how the Campbells displaced the Fletchers at Achallader and on the Braes of Orchy. And the shepherds at Achallader urge the authenticity of this story by pointing to a green hillock, situated close to the farmhouse. Since

this hillock is supposed to mark the spot where was interred the miscreant whom Fletcher killed with the tethering-peg, it still goes by a Gaelic name meaning the Grave of the Stranger.

"The Sweetest Bite."

Among the doughtiest of the Highland chiefs in olden times was Sir Ewen Cameron of Locheil, XVIIth Chief of the Clan Cameron. The following folk-tale concerning Sir Ewen is yet recited round the peat-fire flame in Locheil's Country.

When, at the instance of Oliver Cromwell, General Monk came to Scotland to assume military control, he strove as hard by corruption as by violence to break down the resistance to the new regime. Namely among those continuing to espouse the cause of the suspended monarchy was Sir Ewen Cameron, whose loyalty Monk, by all manner of subtlety and bribery, endeavoured to suborn. Monk actually tried to tempt Locheil to exchange his fealty for extensive lands in the neighbourhood of Loch Arkaig, and for a position of importance in the army, for he was, indeed, what the Scots would call "a bonnie fechter." To these overtures was added the promise to meet such debts as Locheil had incurred.

But Locheil would have none of it. Monk, therefore, resolved to overcome his obstinacy by sterner methods. So he stationed a garrison of some two thousand men at Inverlochy, on the fringe of Locheil's Country, with a view to bringing it more directly under his observation and control. It is said that, in addition to these troops, Monk engaged a large body of workmen, whom he employed in various ways connected with the maintenance and efficiency of the garrison.

Only a few days after the formation of this force, Colonel Bryan, Governor at Inverlochy, gave directions for two boats, manned by officers and men, to be used for transporting fresh supplies of timber, which were required both for the purpose of fuelling and of enlarging the garrison's quarters. One of the boats anchored on the Lochaber side of Loch

Linnhe : the other, with some hundred and fifty men aboard, anchored on Locheil's side. This aggravated Locheil exceedingly. From the denser parts of the wood, he and a band of less than forty of his clansmen watched Monk's mercenaries, as they felled and carried away their clan's timber; and, after hurried consultation, it was decided that the Camerons should attack the intruders with such swords and muskets as they could procure. They opened their offensive by the shores of Loch Eil, near the clachan of Achdaliew, using their broadswords, and clubbing Monk's men with the butt end of their muskets when ammunition ran short. However, eventually they were forced to retire before a force so much more numerous, and so much better equipped.

Now, it was during this struggle that Sir Ewen Cameron of Locheil, somehow or other isolated from his clansmen, came to deadly grips with one of the English officers accompanying this timber-felling contingent. In the life-and-death contest that ensued, the Highlander lay writhing on his back, utterly overpowered. As he groaned beneath the weight of his antagonist, within less than the proverbial inch of his life, he made one final effort to free himself. Suddenly raising his head, he seized the officer's throat between his powerful teeth—the throat that, as he himself used to contend, " God put in my mouth ! "

In this wise he managed to disengage himself, and to disable his opponent. He then proceeded to the water's edge to wash his blood-stained lips; and in Locheil's Country it is told of Sir Ewen Cameron to this day that, in so doing, he remarked to the English officer : " That was the sweetest bite I ever had in my life ! "

This incident had a curious sequel.

Many years later, when Sir Ewen travelled to London to be present at Court, he visited a barber's shop to have his beard attended to. As the barber's razor was passing over his throat, the barber, in conversational mood, asked him whether he was from the North.

" Indeed, I am that ! " replied Sir Ewen. " And do you know anything about the North ? "

" No ! " responded the barber, " nor do I desire to. They are all a pack of savages up there. Would you believe it,

sir, one of them tore the throat out of my father with his teeth? I only wish that I had that fellow's throat as near to me now as I have your's!"

When Sir Ewen returned to his own country, he related this incident to his kinsfolk. And he used to admit that never in all his life had he felt his end so near as when that London barber's razor grazed his wind-pipe.

CHAPTER XIX

FOLK-TALES OF HIGHLAND HOSPITALITY

HOSPITALITY, even to this day, has remained one of the great and enduring characteristics of the Highlanders and the Hebrideans. But folk-tales of such Highland Hospitality—to give this characteristic the title by which it has become proverbial throughout the world—are not numerous, probably because the mere giving of such was regarded as usual and common-place, rather than as something extraordinary, and therefore deserving of special recognition and commemoration.

Yet, traditionary tales of the giving of Highland Hospitality in very exceptional circumstances have been handed down to us, such as that concerning MacGregor of Glen Strae, which actually is founded upon fact, and which I take the liberty of repeating hereafter largely in the words in which it appears in *Wild Drumalbain: The Road to Meggernie & Glen Coe,* one of my earlier books. It was upon this tale that Sir Walter Scott based much of *The Lady of the Lake.* At Coilantogle Ford, the old-time crossing-place on the River Teith, Roderic Dubh, having safely conducted James Fitz-James through watch and ward, and " far past Clan Alpin's outmost guard," revealed himself to be the head of a rebellious clan. It was at this spot that Roderic, now having discharged his trust in good faith, summoned the Knight of Snowdoun to mortal combat—

> " See, here, all vantageless I stand,
> Armed, like thyself, with single brand;
> For this is Coilantogle Ford,
> And thou must keep thee with thy sword."

In the real story, however, the MacGregor contestant gave his foeman a fairer fighting chance, and a more generous means of escape, than did Roderic, who, without any warning or pretext, threw down the gauntlet before the unsuspecting Knight of Snowdoun, and provoked him, "man to man and steel to steel."

Apart from tales such as that of MacGregor of Glen Strae, there are some that tell of Highland Hospitality at the hands of mysterious and elusive persons like the Wife of Ben-y-Ghloe, or at the hands of hosts who committed what was regarded among the Celts of the Highlands and Islands as one of the most unpardonable of all crimes—that of treachery to one's guest.

The Wife of Ben-y-Ghloe.

Upon a time, two men known throughout Atholl as Donald and Big Iain were poaching on the slopes of Ben-y-Ghloe, when they were caught in a storm. They lost their way; but they came at evening to a hollow, in which was a bothy. In the bothy they found a woman, whose large and unprepossessing features aroused their curiosity. As she neither welcomed their entry, nor expressed displeasure at it, Donald and Big Iain presumed that everything was all right. They therefore seated themselves comfortably before her fire. When they asked the woman for food, she set fresh trout before them, remarking in so doing that little did they anticipate hospitality at the hands of one, of whose existence they were completely unaware. When, later in the evening, guests and hostess fell into conversation, she informed them that it was *she* who had brought on the storm, so as to entice them to visit her bothy.

That night Donald and Big Iain tarried there, on the slopes of Ben-y-Ghloe. They found their unknown hostess in every way conversant with the formalities denoting Highland Hospitality. As they were leaving in the morning, she revealed to them that she was the Wife of Ben-y-Ghloe, and assured them of a welcome, if ever again they should lose their way on this mountain.

But Donald and Big Iain never paid her a second visit. Nor were they able to say whether she was human or elfin.

The Man from Inverlochy.

Tales of a similar nature are told of the hospitality granted to soldiers engaged in the wars that unsettled the Highlands for so many centuries.

After the Battle of Inverlochy, a soldier fled into the wilds of Lochaber. Wounded and far spent, he came at night to the door of a cottage, to which he had been attracted by a faint light glimmering in a window. With trembling hand, he knocked at the door, which was opened to him by an old woman of sad countenance. "Come in, and take your breath!" she said to the fugitive in gentle, Gaelic tones.

Years afterwards that Man from Inverlochy committed his adventures and experiences to writing; and of the old woman of Lochaber he wrote: "May God grant that she shall have her share of Paradise, for that night she spoke the sweetest words to me that ever came from a woman's lips!"

MacNab's Welcome to the Sheriff-Officer.

As did so many Highland lairds, one of the chiefs of the Clan MacNab fell into the bad habit of contracting debts which he seemed never likely to be in a position to liquidate. In due course there arrived from Edinburgh a sheriff-officer charged with the duty of serving a summons upon him in respect of his financial liabilities. Not to be put out by the arrival of such an emissary, the MacNab invited the sheriff-officer to make himself quite at home; and, upon the plea that the latter could not very well return to Edinburgh that day, the MacNab persuaded him to tarry the night. Meanwhile he regaled him copiously with whisky. After dark, when the unsolicited guest had fallen into a drunken drowse by the fire, the MacNab directed a number of his retainers to construct a life-sized effigy of the sheriff-officer, and to suspend the same by the neck from the bough of a tree

readily seen from the window of the room in which it was arranged that the king's messenger should spend the night.

"What horrid thing is that I am seeing?" gasped the sheriff-officer, on rising the following morning.

"Och, nothing at all, at all!" replied the MacNab, with an air of complete indifference. "Only a messenger that came from Edinburgh the other day to serve a summons on myself!"

The ruse proved successful. The sheriff-officer, now stricken with visions of himself dangling in like manner, hastily quitted the house of the MacNab, and returned to Edinburgh with the summons unserved.

Rory Mòr's Revelry at Rodil.

On a night of nights in 1601, Rory Mòr MacLeod revelled at Rodil with his retainers, after he had carried fire and sword into the territory of his enemies, sparing no living thing. Moreover, it was a night on which Rory declared that even his fiercest foe might be admitted to his banquet without endangering himself.

As it happened, a galley of the Clan Ranald, with Donald Mac Iain Mhic Sheumais aboard, was driven ashore that very night on the wild coast of Harris, not very far from Rodil; and Rory, suspiciously eager to fulfil his declaration, already having received word that misfortune had overtaken his bitterest foe, sent a henchman to meet the storm-delayed crew, and to persuade its members to join his revelry and accept of his hospitality. Rory even went the length of directing that a wooden outhouse should be erected forthwith, that the MacDonalds might shelter therein until the storm had abated, or at any rate until daybreak. Apprehensive, and not without due reason, were the Clan Ranald seamen, since Rory in his time had set many a trap, and had trapped many an unsuspecting enemy. And so, with a change of wind in the early hours of the morning, they repaired to their galley, which they had drawn up above tide mark among the rocks near Rodil on the previous night. Scarcely were they afloat when they observed that the outhouse was ablaze. Clan Ranald's men by this time were well out of

reach. And for their breach of Highland Hospitality the MacLeods were held up to scorn for many a day. As Donald Mac Iain Mhic Sheumais and his kinsmen sailed away in their galley for Uist, the Clan Ranald piper played a tune that ever since has been known as *The MacLeods are Disgraced.*

Doubtless, this is the incident that was in the mind of Sir Walter Scott when he wrote the lines—

> "When, if a hope of safety rest,
> 'Tis on the sacred name of guest,
> Who seeks for shelter, storm-distressed,
> Within a chieftain's hall."

Donald Gorm Storm-stayed at Dunvegan.

A similar attempt to ensnare the crew of a Clan Ranald birlinn was made by MacLeod when Donald Gorm Mac-Donald, on a return voyage to Uist, was forced to seek shelter in Loch Dunvegan. At this time there was great and bitter rivalry between Rory Mòr and Donald Gorm. So, Dunvegan was scarcely the place that the latter would have selected by choice, had stress of storm not compelled him to land in this neighbourhood.

Tradition has it that MacLeod saw Donald Gorm's galley making for the shore in the storm, and that, in accordance with the custom of the country, he despatched a messenger to convey his greetings to the crew, and to invite it to accept MacLeod's hospitality at Dunvegan Castle. Donald Gorm and his men were ready in the circumstances to accept; and they duly made their way to the Castle, which in those days was so noted for its hospitality as to have been known as the Dun of the Hospitality of the Winecups.

But, when MacLeod invited his illustrious guest to seat himself at his host's table, Donald Gorm replied: "When from home, Donald Gorm never sits but in the company of his men." Hard as the Chief of MacLeod tried to assure him that his men would be amply provided for in another apartment, Donald Gorm became obdurate. The more MacLeod attempted to persuade him, the more determined

he was to partake of food only when his clansmen were admitted to the same apartment.

That evening the termination of the meal was marked by a long carouse. MacLeod soon warmed up to the occasion; and, turning to Donald Gorm by way of vague recollection, he inquired of him whether it was not he who had killed his father.

"It has been laid to my charge that I killed three despicable Highland lairds," came the ready retort; "and I reck not of adding a fourth to that list this very night! There's the dirk that laid your father low. It has a point and a haft; and its edge is sharp indeed! And, what's more, it is held by the second best hand in Skye!"

"And whose hand is the best?" inquired MacLeod, with a faint hope that Donald Gorm, out of courtesy for his host, might have accorded to MacLeod's hand the foremost place.

Thereupon Donald Gorm alertly changed the dirk to the left hand, raised the weapon in the air, and exclaimed: "There it is!"

MacLeod, who was not a little taken by surprise at this unexpected development, did not accept the challenge, and discreetly disregarded an innuendo that, in ordinary circumstances, would have led to bloodshed without further delay.

When it was time to retire for the night, Donald Gorm was offered a separate apartment in Dunvegan Castle. But, to MacLeod's wheedlings that he should have a quiet night, he replied: "When from home, Donald Gorm never sleeps apart from his men." Much as he was enticed with offers of comfortable and luxurious quarters, he so steadfastly declined that in the end it was found necessary to provide accommodation for him and his men in the kiln (*ath*), a capacious, thatched erection, such as in olden times was possessed by almost every township for the preparation of corn prior to grinding.

Weary, indeed, were Donald Gorm's men that night; and they truly slept the sleep of the storm-worn. But Donald Gorm closed not an eye. Stealthily there came to the kiln at the first flush of dawn a friend, who advised him and his men to evacuate the place with all haste, and to close the kiln door behind them, so as to make believe that they still

occupied it. By this time the wind had fallen considerably. Down to the shore of Loch Dunvegan they ran to launch their birlinn. And, when steering seaward, they noticed that the kiln was a mass of shooting flames. Donald Gorm and his men were well out of MacLeod's reach by this time; and eventually they reached their beloved Uist without scaith.

A Tale of Old Glen Strae.

This is a story of long, long ago, since the first scenes of it were enacted before the MacGregors were ousted by the trickery of their Campbell adversaries from their ancestral home in Glen Strae, and when the Lamonts, those stout-hearted and resolute Lairds of Cowal, were still in residence at Castle Toward, their ancient stronghold at the eastern entrance to the Kyles of Bute.

It so happened that, in the days of his early manhood, young Lamont and a single companion from Cowal were hunting in the Forest of Etive, through which, it is said, they were passing on their way to Inverlochy; and whom should they meet in the valley below—the Greyfir Shoulder —but Glen Strae's son and heir, who along with one or two of his followers was on a similar errand. MacGregor and Lamont agreed to pursue the chase together. When it was toward dusk, and the mists were deploying among the barren, lofty places of Argyll, they and their retainers betook themselves to Kingshouse Inn. Here they resolved to put up for the night; and here an unhappy episode ensued, for young MacGregor and Lamont had a violent quarrel, which terminated only when the former fell to the ground under the weight of Lamont's dirk. Lamont, when he perceived that he had murdered his fellow-huntsman, in order to escape immediate vengeance at the hands of MacGregor's followers, straightway fled into the night-enshrouded mountains.

Lamont, in his anxiety to return to Castle Toward lest his enemies should encompass him, found himself at a dark, morning hour in Glen Strae, nearly twenty miles away from Kingshouse as the crow flies, and certainly very much farther by the route which he needs must have taken. Not

knowing where he was, and to whom to turn for protection from young MacGregor's followers, who came at his heels, he arrived at the door of a house in the glen, whither he had been attracted by a light that glowed in the window. Here, in despair, he entered and begged for protection. Little was Lamont aware that he had sought refuge at the house of the Chief of Glen Strae, whose son he had just slain; and it was not until young MacGregor's men came to the same door shortly afterwards, and demanded the refugee to be handed over to them, that the Chief learned that the man, to whom he had given hospitality, and whom he had vowed to defend from the wrath of his pursuers, had killed his own son.

"Here this night you will be safe, whoever you be!" were the words with which MacGregor of Glen Strae had received Lamont, before he knew the reason for his flight. And, although MacGregor's wife and family filled the house with their lamentations, and remonstrated with him, and would have had him deliver the fugitive into the hands of those whom he had bereft, the Chief replied that already he had given his word. (A MacGregor's word meant something in those far-off days!)

"But he has slain your son!" was the retort of his clansmen, who besieged the door of his house, and clamoured disappointedly without.

"Let no one hurt a hair of the lad's head," replied Glen Strae. . . . MacGregor has vowed that he will shield him; and, as I live, he shall be safe while he remains under my roof!"

How long Lamont remained under MacGregor's roof, I am unable to say. But we know that at daybreak one morning the broken-hearted Chief ordered Lamont to prepare himself for a journey, and in person escorted him from Glen Strae, across many a hill and through many a glen, until at length they arrived at a place on Loch Fyne called Dundarave, the Castle of the Two Oars—an ancient, turreted keep of the MacNaughtons, not far distant from Inveraray. Here, at the ferry, MacGregor procured a boat and two oars for Lamont, that he might row himself over to Cowal, on the opposite shore of Loch Fyne, and have a

sporting chance of reaching Castle Toward without being overtaken. And, when taking leave of one another, MacGregor turned to his guest and said: "Lamont, when thou art safe in thine own country, I can promise to defend thee no longer. So keep out of the reach of my clansmen. . . . Flee for thy life; and may God forgive thee!"

For many a long day Lamont kept himself clear of Clan Gregor: seldom did he venture far from Castle Toward. But some years afterwards circumstances in old Scotland were changed; and misfortunes of a different nature dogged the footsteps of the MacGregors of Glen Strae—in efficiency, in unscrupulousness, in cunning, the tactics of the wily Campbells had increased a hundredfold. And it was a sad, sad day for Clan Alpin when, by rapacity and treachery, the Wry-Mouthed were successful at last in establishing themselves at the doors of Glen Lyon, Glen Orchy, and Glen Strae. Then followed the wholesale forfeiture of lands, and the persecution and proscription of the whole of Clan Alpin. No one dared bear the name of MacGregor under pain of death; and those who were known to be of our race were pursued with beagles, and with the ruthless cruelties that so characterised the vehemence of our oppressors.

Such were the circumstances that drove MacGregor of Glen Strae, now an old man, into the wilds of Cowal: such were the events that brought him, pale and woebegone, to the threshold of Castle Toward: such were the ill-fortunes that compelled him to beg for hospitality and asylum at the hands of the once fugitive Lamont.

For many a day the broken-hearted and venerable MacGregor of Glen Strae sojourned at Castle Toward as the guest of Lamont. The guest was one who had forgiven; and the host was eager to repay the guest who had spared his life, and had conducted him in safety "far past Clan Alpin's outmost guard."

And it was under the roof of Lamont, when the boughs of evergreen pine had been bent and distorted by craft more powerful than the winds of Caledon, that the agèd MacGregor of Glen Strae breathed his last. And there, by the Chapel of Toward-an-Uilt, but far away from the tomb

of his royal ancestors, the old Chief was laid to rest in the clods that are hidden among the long, waving grasses of Cowal.

There the wind is heavy-laden with salten tears, and the wheeling sea-birds scream their coronach!

CHAPTER XX

NORSE AND VIKING FOLK-TALES

EXACTLY when the rieving Northmen and Vikings began their inroads upon Scotland and her islands is a little uncertain; but for centuries these fair, fearless fellows, with the sea ever restless in their blood, dominated great stretches of our country until 1263, the year in which the Battle of Largs decided the fate of King Haco and his fleet.

The influence of this foreign domination upon the sociology and ethnology of Scotland cannot be exaggerated. And, whereas the ancient Gaelic language remained the tongue of the people, the persistence with which the Norse invaders rivetted their language upon the Western Highlands and Hebrides, as also upon the Northern Isles, so far as place-names are concerned, is remarkable.

The legendry and folk-lore that have come down to us from the time of this occupation have a quality of their own, though several of the folk-tales still current show both influences—Celtic with Norse modifications, or Norse with Celtic modifications.

Certain traditions concerning these fearless and imaginative invaders are widespread as, for instance, the belief that hundreds of years ago most of the Long Island (the Outer Hebrides) was an impenetrable forest, which the Northmen fired in order to monopolise the timber trade. And, again, it is held that, with a view to reducing the likelihood of their being set upon unawares by the natives lying in ambush, the Northmen of Viking and post-Viking times burned the woods in the hope of their being able to observe any enemy advancing in the distance, and to sally forth to encounter them in the open.

In any case, we are aware that the expeditions in the time of Magnus Bareleg, toward the close of the eleventh

century, laid waste the Outer Isles, and also considerable tracts of the mainland, with fire and sword. According to the Sagas, it was in 1098 that Magnus "went with the fire" through Uist, and that "fire played in the fig-trees" in Lewis.

The ensuing folk-tales are typical of many that are recounted yet in the Highlands and Islands, and by a people jealous for its traditions, and justifiably proud of the qualities it has inherited from those dauntless, blue-eyed colonisers who, centuries ago, came across the northern seas in their galleys.

The Death of Sweno.

There was a king of Lochlann who had a son named Sweno; and on a day Sweno, the king's son, sailed the seas with a doughty crew, and much bright gold aboard. By his step-mother, a wise woman who could envisage disaster, he had been warned to steer clear of Cape Wrath, of Pol Dubh, and of Pol Darrachgawn.

On and on sailed Sweno and his doughty men, until at length they arrived at *Port an Stuvanaig*, Sweno's Port. At the time of dropping anchor, they did not know what land they had made. Their arrival, however, occasioned fear and consternation among the inhabitants of this northern land. With soot from their pots and swees, the inhabitants blackened their faces, and in other ways prepared themselves for any untoward contingency. In their small boats they rowed out to the strange ship from Lochlann; and eventually they were able to convey to Sweno that he had come to a place called Pol Gawn.

"The Lord have mercy on my soul," said Sweno, "if indeed this be Pol Gawn!" So he directed his crew to weigh anchor and spread sail. Yet, though they attempted to stand out to sea, the men of Assynt and of the Isles hindered them. They boarded Sweno's ship in great numbers, and demanded of him that he should surrender both himself and his cargo.

But the Lochlannaich—the men from Lochlann—felt otherwise disposed. Above deck and below, they fought

valiantly against the men of Assynt and the Isles, until one from Pol Gawn surprised Sweno himself, and put him to the sword. With the last breath of Sweno vanished the keen spirit of the men from Lochlann. In the hope of being allowed to get away with their lives, and possibly with the ship, they surrendered their gold treasure and all other valuable things aboard.

The men of Assynt and the Isles now began to transfer the gold in plaids to their small boats, which meanwhile were moored alongside. But one plaid, owing to the inordinate weight of the treasure, tore in twain. This resulted in the treasure's slipping down between the gunwale and the ship from Lochlann, and sinking to the sea's floor off Pol Gawn.

" To-day I go fishing off Pol Gawn." So said the man from Pol Dubh who had slain Sweno, the king's son, a year earlier. As he fished, there came over the waters toward him, swiftly and secretly, a boat in which was a man armed with bow and arrow, and with copious gold embroidered on his apparel. As the boat neared, the fisher recognised that its sole occupant had on him the face of Sweno, son of the King of Lochlann. Thereupon the fisher received an arrow in his breast; and, as he was sinking to death, he was heard to mutter :" *Eh! Mes me hae, es me fuhr!* " which is interpreted as meaning " Ah, if I gave it before, I receive it now ! "

The heart of Sweno was interred above the shore here, at *Port an Stuvanaig,* Sweno's Port. The fisher-folks of that beautiful Sutherland fiord called Laxford say that his body was embalmed by his sailor-men, and taken home to Lochlann for burial beneath the flag-stones of the king's choir.

The Price of Deception.

The story of Sweno recalls that associated with Eilean Maolrubha, one of the largest of the islands in Loch Maree, and the one upon which stand two ancient stones still pointed out by the inhabitants of Wester Ross as marking two graves said to date back to Norse times. It is told

that during the Norse occupation of the Western Highlands and Islands, some eight or ten centuries ago, there lived on Eilean Maolrubha a maiden of noble birth, who had plighted her troth with a Viking prince. However, the prince's prolonged absence from Loch Maree on various warlike enterprises caused the maiden to feel that he no longer cared for her. So as to test her lover, she decided that, when again his galley was reported to be making for the shore at Loch Ewe (this being the sea-shore nearest to the Loch of Maree), her handmaidens would row her out to meet the galley, while she herself would pretend to be a corpse stretched out at the bottom of the boat. The handmaidens, as they neared the galley, began to moan and wail, so as to lend appropriate colour to the deception. The prince, overcome with grief, now cried out to the rowers of the boat for an explanation of the tragedy that seemingly had befallen his betrothed. The maiden was then assured that the prince loved her more than she had imagined; but, as she was on the point of discarding her pretence, he thrust a dirk into his heart, and fell dead.

Remorse now covered the maiden: her ruse had caused the death of her lover. Plucking the dirk out of his corpse, she instantly buried it deep in her own heart. Thus died both maiden and Viking prince. They were buried side by side on the island known as Eilean Maolrubha, in Loch Maree, and in a grave that to this very day is marked by two ancient stones, situated quite close to one another, each of them bearing a cross, rudely fashioned.

A Viking Tale of Raasay.

On the Island of Raasay there is a loch which is believed to have received the name of Loch Storab through the following incident. Some time during the dominance of the Northmen, Storab, son of the King of Norway, a fugitive for some reason unexplained, found himself in hiding on an islet in this loch. When the people of Raasay discovered his hiding-place, they resolved to dislodge him. Storab was a man of giant stature and of giant accomplishments: he was able to leap between the islet and the shore

without wetting himself. Under cover of dark he was wont to visit the wife of a tacksman on Raasay, who supplied him with provender. As the men of Raasay could not reach the islet with the same facility as did Storab, they decided to drain the loch. Storab, now realising himself to be in danger, leapt ashore, and made for the house of the tacksman, expecting that there he would receive asylum. But the tacksman's wife was now afraid of the consequences that inevitably would have followed, had the men of Raasay realised that she secretly had been befriending Storab. And, as he was on the point of seeking refuge elsewhere, an arrow pierced his thigh, and wounded him fatally.

And it is said in the Hebrides that, when Biornal, Storab's sister, learnt of her brother's death at the hands of the people of Raasay, she harried that island with fire and sword. And she directed that, when she died, she should be buried at a site overlooking Raasay. To this day the folks of northern Skye are able to locate on a rocky shelf about the summit of the mountain called Sron Bhiornal the tomb from which the spirit of Biornal overlooks Raasay Isle.

This story reminds one of the cairn situated on the summit of Beinn na Caillich, not far from Broadford, in the Isle of Skye. This cairn is believed to mark the site of burial of a Norse princess who died at Ord. On her deathbed this princess commanded her attendants to convey her, when dead, to the top of Beinn na Caillich, and to bury her there, in order that she might lie in the wake of the winds from Norway.

It is the traditions associated with this cairn that MacCulloch, the geologist, in his *Description of the Western Isles of Scotland,* asks to be excused from repeating, since he considered them, one and all, to be unworthy of regard. But, then, MacCulloch was a most tiresome fellow; and he seems to have imbued most of his writings with something of the same tiresomeness.

Well of Beothail's Bones.

The story of the burial of yet another Viking princess is associated with Lismore, that island lying between the Lynn

of Lorne and the Lynn of Morven, and noted in ancient times for the fertility that gave it a Celtic name meaning "The Great Garden."

On this Island stood Castle Coeffin, stronghold of a Viking prince in the days when the suzerainty of Norway extended over all this countryside. In the inlet below the Castle this prince kept his war galleys in constant readiness. He neither allowed his galleys to rest, nor his arms to rust.

With this prince lived his sister, the fair Beothail, who is spoken of in the folk-tale and legendry of Argyll and the Isles as having been of a disposition as gentle as that of her brother was merciless. "Her footsteps were as the music of songs," says an old Gaelic proverb of Beothail—so ready was she to temper the winds to the lambs shorn by her brother's fierceness.

Beothail pined away and died of grief on Lismore: her lover, one of the most intrepid of all the sons of Lochlann, had been slain when on a rieving expedition to a foreign land. Her remains were interred in one of the two knolls situated close to Castle Coeffin. But Beothail never ceased from crying in her death-sleep, for she desired that her kinsfolk should exhume her, and bear her upon the northern tide for burial in Lochlann.

In course of time, her father, the King of Lochlann, requisitioned a vessel to sail for Lismore, to carry home her remains. She was exhumed right duly. Her corpse, before shipment, was washed in the sacred well of St. Moluag, the Patron Saint of Lismore and of the neighbouring Isles. On its arrival in Lochlann, it was re-interred with Viking ceremony in the burial-place of the kings and their kindred.

But the earthly frame of Beothail was restless; and there was no accounting for its restlessness until it was discovered that one of her toes was missing! Thereupon the King of Lochlann directed that forthwith the vessel should return to Lismore, so that a search might be made for the bones of the missing toe. In the well, in which the corpse had been washed, the bones were found. And from that day until now this well has been known by a Gaelic name meaning the Well of Beothail's Bones. Not until the bones of her toe

had been interred with the rest of her did she find repose in Lochlann.

To this very day, they say on Lismore, the spot where Beothail was first interred resembles a vacant tomb.

Til, the Warrior-Prince from Lochlann.

Sweno is not the only son of the King of Norway (Lochlann) of whom we hear in the folk-tales of the Highlands and Islands.

Toward the evening of an autumn day in the years unmeasured by dates, some women were gathered together to discuss a festival that was to be observed on the following day by all the countryside. And sad, indeed, were two young women that it was their lot to tend to the cattle while their neighbours were to be rejoicing. But there came to their solace a kind, elderly woman who, in order that they might join in the latter part of the festivities, offered to undertake for them the watching of the cattle during the following night.

Her thoughtful proposal the maidens gratefully accepted; and at falling light they hied away to adorn themselves for the feast, while the old woman repaired to the moor, where the cattle had been left to roam about at will. As was the custom in those far-off times, she kindled in a hollow on the moor a large fire, to scare away evil spirits. With her distaff and spindle she seated herself on the outskirts of a necropolis that we may surmise was a pagan one.

About midnight the earth round the old woman began to heave heavily. The graves in the burying-ground were opened; and groups of weird, spirit-like creatures hurried hither and thither in noiseless confusion, and then vanished in a northerly airt. From a huge grave immediately in front of her there arose a tall, warrior figure, that paused for a brief moment before speeding away in the same direction. Hours later the warrior returned; but in the interval the old woman had lain her distaff across the grave, so as to prevent his re-entering it until he had given her an account of his behaviour.

"And wilt thou not remove thy distaff that I may return

to earth?" asked the warrior of the old woman, whom he found by his grave when he came back from his mysterious journey.

"If thou wilt answer me three questions, I will do so," replied the old woman, who by this time had forgotten all about her wandering cattle.

And the first question she put to him was: "Where hast thou been?"

To this he answered that on each Hallowe'en he and all his countrymen, wheresoever buried, had the privilege of returning to Lochlann for an hour or two.

"Who art thou, and what is thy name?" she then asked him.

"My name is Til. I am a son of the King of Norway; but off the coast of Skye my warriors and I were drowned during a storm. My body was washed ashore here; and I was interred in the grave to which I now seek to return."

And to this day the place is called Pooltiel.

Now, the natives of that part of Skye known as Glendale believe that the body of *Til, Mac Righ Lochlainn,* Til, Son of the King of Norway, came ashore at a point near the head of Loch Pooltiel, and that ultimately his remains were committed to earth in their burying-ground of Cille Chomgain, the Cell of Saint Comgan. Indeed, some say that Til was the very first person to have been buried here. And there is an elder-tree of unknown antiquity in that same burying-ground, under which the folks of Skye say that Til lies; and to the present time it is taboo for anyone to injure that tree in any way.

Some years ago this elder-tree was damaged accidentally, while a grave was being dug quite close to it; and this greatly perturbed the folks of Glendale and Pooltiel.

It is supposed in western Skye that, before the drowning of Til, the Norse warrior-prince, Loch Pooltiel was termed *Loch a' Chuain,* Loch of the Ocean. And another reminiscence of the connection between Glendale and Norway is perpetuated in the name, *Lochlannach,* which is still the name given locally to a crag in the neighbourhood of Loch Pooltiel.

And the third and last question that the old woman asked

the warrior was what would be her fate in days to come. To this Til replied: "Thou shalt yet have a son; and thou shalt call him Coinneach (Kenneth). And thy son shall possess the gift of the seer."

Thereupon she removed her distaff, and permitted Til to return to his lair once more.

About a year after these strange happenings, the old woman, to the astonishment of her acquaintances, was as Sarah, for she bare a son in her old age. And she named him Coinneach; and this Coinneach, on account of his sallow complexion, was called *Odhar*. Soon Coinneach Odhar manifested signs of divination; and in later life he became well known throughout Scotland for his gift of the second-sight.

Such is the story of the traditional Coinneach Odhar as I got it some years ago at Kilchoan, in Dunvegan, and from the lips of that lovely woman, the late Frances Tolmie, whose cottage nestled beside the loch, and in the shadow of the slope known as Creag a' Chlachain, where the rooks used to call at sundown.

The Isle of Skye is rich in folk-tales about the Norse and Vikings; and few reach as far as Kyle of Lochalsh without hearing the tradition about ruined Castle Maol, perched above the shore at Kyleakin, and said to have been built during the time of the Norse occupation by "Saucy Mary," the daughter of a Scandinavian king. By the maintenance of a great chain stretching across the kyle from a point below the Castle, she is said to have prevented all foreign vessels from passing through, until they had paid toll. To this day the older inhabitants point out a boulder by the Skye shore, to which they believe this chain to have been attached, and also the impress made on this boulder by the grating of that chain.

Tradition in Lewis has it that in ancient times a similar chain was suspended across the narrows between Lundale and the Isle of Bernera, to enable a Norse princess to collect dues from vessels passing through the strait. As evidence of strength and prowess, every stranger presuming to be a fit and proper person to set foot on the Great Bernera was required to swing this chain; and at low tide the ferryman

used to point out on the foreshore, immediately below Lundale, the massive boulder round which one end of the ponderous chain was tied. And it is said in western Lewis that the natives of the Great Bernera used to conceal themselves behind the Druidical stones at Barraglom, so that therefrom they might discharge missiles at such as essayed to cross the narrows without having passed the preliminary qualification of swinging the chain.

Kisimul Castle and the Lochlannaich.

One of the MacNeil chiefs of Barra, it is said, driven out of Kisimul Castle by the Lochlannaich—the Norsemen —was forced to seek shelter in Ireland. He had two children, a boy and a girl, both of whom attended school in Ireland. But the children were at a loss to understand why their Irish schoolmates took delight in calling them *na Barraich*—that is to say, "the Barra-ites." They complained frequently to their parents about the indignity to which they were being subjected at school; and at last they succeeded in persuading their father to explain matters. He confessed to them that he was the exiled chief of an island in the Hebrides called Barra, in a bay in which stood a great castle known as Kisimul, from which they all had been driven forth when the Lochlannaich seized their patrimony.

The boy, whenever he heard his father's woeful tale, swore vengeance on the Lochlannaich, and immediately began to devise schemes such as might be the means of restoring the ancient ancestral stronghold of Kisimul to its rightful owners. Soon he was making arrangements with the crew of an Irish vessel to convey him and his sister in an eight-oared galley to the Barra Isles.

When MacNeil realised that his children were intent on going to the Outer Hebrides in the hope of wresting Kisimul from the Lochlannaich, he supplied them with certain sailing directions, since none of the crew was too familiar with the navigable waters hereabouts. Having explained to them that to the southward of Barra there lay five fairly large islands, he told them that, if there still resided on the

High summer near Duiletter, in Glen Strae—an ancient patrimony of the Clan Gregor.

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Castle of Eilean Donan, in Kintail, at the meeting of Lochs Alsh, Long, and Duich. The mountain in the background is Beinn na Caillich, in Skye.

Kisimul Castle, Isle of Barra—the ancient stronghold of the Chiefs of the MacNeils of Barra.

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island called Sandray an old, trusty friend of his, they should take him into their confidence, because he knew of no one who could render to them more valuable assistance in the attainment of their purpose.

Eventually brother and sister embarked from Ireland; and at the falling of the succeeding day the Irish skipper descried what he took to be Berneray, the island on which Barra Head Lighthouse now stands, and the most southerly of the Outer Hebrides. Some hours later young MacNeil and his sister found themselves on the strand of Sandray Isle, whence, following their father's instructions, they made for a certain house, into which daylight and air were admitted by mere holes in the wall in lieu of windows. Having crept up to the wall and listened at one of the holes, the boy was relieved to learn from a conversation in progress within that the inmates of the house still were loyal to his father's cause. Keeking through one of the holes, he observed an old man lying face downward upon the earthen floor, near the fire, while the old wife was rubbing salt butter into his back.

"If old MacNeil would be in Barra, it's no' myself that would be in this sorry plight," the old man was heard to mutter through his writhing. At the opportune moment young MacNeil and his sister entered the house, and made themselves known to its agèd occupants. In course of conversation, they discovered that the old man tenanted the Isle of Sandray; and, by way of explaining his pitiable condition to them, he related how the new governor at Kisimul Castle had slashed him across the back for his being unable to pay his rent to the full.

MacNeil and his sister had scarcely divulged the object of their mission when the old man expressed his willingness to assist them, as best he could, in driving the Lochlannaich out of Kisimul. As the tide was at the turn, they and the Irish crew hastened toward Castlebay, in order that they might seize the *geimhleag*—the iron level or crow-bar—before the tide came in upon it again. Everything went according to plan. With the aid of the *geimhleag,* the portcullis of Kisimul was levered up; and in a trice young MacNeil, his sister, the old man, and the Irish crew, having

taken the garrison by surprise, slew its Lochlannaich occupants to a man.

In order to "mak siccar," the old man of Sandray Isle advised young MacNeil to leave no stone unturned in endeavouring to dislodge from a castle near Loch Boisdale the most formidable man among the Lochlannaich rievers, who at this time infested every creek of the Western Isles. Therefore they hurried off to South Uist to complete their task. On arrival there, the old man stealthily approached the castle held by the Lochlannaich, and deceived its guard into believing that an enemy was at hand. When the chief man among them put his head out of one of the peep-holes, so as to ascertain from which direction the enemy was coming, the old man of Sandray sent an arrow through his neck, with the result that he could not withdraw his head into the castle. In this wise perished the leader of the Lochlannaich in South Uist.

The remainder of the garrison was put to the edge of the sword; and so successful had been the tactics employed by young MacNeil, with the help of the old man of Sandray and the Irish seamen, that he was able to return to Ireland forthwith, taking with him the tidings that the time was come when his father might resume his occupancy of Kisimul.

And thus it was that the MacNeils found their way back to Barra.

MacNeil's Bardess Deceives the Norsemen.

Tradition has it that, a decade or two after the return of the MacNeils to Kisimul Castle, the Norsemen came again to the Barra Isles, and sought to reduce their stronghold to submission. On this visit they brought with them so great a fleet of birlinns that they were able to ravage the entire Island of Barra with impunity. Only Kisimul held out against the besiegers; and so persistently had they blockaded the ancient fortress that its surrender seemed a matter of days. As time dragged on, increasing starvation faced the garrison; and it was then that the happy idea struck MacNeil's bardess, Nic Iain Fhinn, of dyeing a cow's hide a different colour each day, and hanging it over the battle-

ments of the castle to dry, so as to make believe that its defenders had an ample supply of emergency rations, and were far from surrendering. Soon the Norsemen became discontented and demoralised; and, wearying of their protracted siege, they weighed anchor and sailed away for Lochlann.

Eilean Donan Wrested from the King's Troops.

The ruse whereby the besieged in Kisimul Castle successfully induced the Norse invaders to abandon their siege is reminiscent of the tale, still recounted in the Western Highlands, of how the natives of Kintail, by employing another ruse, were able to wrest the Castle of Eilean Donan from the king's troops. This tale, however, is believed to relate to an event that occurred at a date subsequent to the Norse occupation of the Highlands and Islands.

On the pretext that lowering skies and the ominous croaking of ravens foreshadowed torrential rain while the Kintail folks were in process of securing their harvest, one of their number approached the Castle with the request that the governor should allow the garrison to lend the harvesters a hand. To this request the governor acceded. But the garrison, on its return from harvesting, found Eilean Donan in the hands of the men of Kintail.

"The oldest inhabitant of the parish," according to the *Statistical Account,* "remembers to have seen the Kintail men under arms, dancing on the leaden roof of the castle, just as they were setting out for the Battle of Sheriffmuir, where this resolute band was cut to pieces." [1]

[1] This, doubtless, is the incident that inspired the late Lockhart Bogle to commit to canvas his wonderful painting entitled "The Night before the Raid: MacRae Clansmen dancing on the Leaden Roof of Eilean Donan before leaving for Sheriffmuir." This picture is one of the most beautiful works of art I have ever seen. At frequent intervals during the last fifteen years, it was my privilege, when visiting friends in Glasgow, to sit facing it at meal-times. In 1936 the late Colonel MacRae-Gilstrap purchased it for fifty pounds from Lockhart Bogle's sister-in-law. It ought to have found a permanent place in some national collection: so far as I am aware, there is nothing like it in any public gallery. Perhaps, this footnote may move some beneficent Scot to buy it back, and present it to the people of Scotland, to whom it rightly belongs.

The Crooked Grey.

In western Lewis there exists a tradition of one called the *Crom Glas*, or Crooked Grey. A thousand years ago—so say the folk of the Isles—the Parish of Uig, in Lewis, belonged to the Crooked Grey, who, in the spring-time of each year, came in his galley from Lochlann to collect the rents due to him by the inhabitants. The people dreaded his coming; and even to this day the name of the Crooked Grey is remembered with awe.

The Fate of Grey Somerled.

The tradition of yet another dreaded personality believed to have been of Norse origin survives in Colonsay. Not far from Machrins, and hard by the west coast of that island, is a ruined *dun* or fort, known as Dun Gallain. In this fort there once lived an elderly and voluptuous tyrant named Grey Somerled, who is said to have been related to the first of the Lords of the Isles.

Grey Somerled came to Colonsay, they say, in the capacity of factor. But he neglected his duties, imposed penalties and hardships on the innocent and defenceless tenants, and generally made himself so disagreeable that at last it was decided to take revenge upon him, previous warnings having been no deterrent.

Like Rory Mòr of Dunvegan, who slept best when he was within hearing of his "nurse," the waterfall, Grey Somerled was wont to be lulled to sleep by the grinding noise of a quern placed near his head. When he retired for the night, one of the servants had to turn the quern-stone by his pillow, and keep on turning it, lest he woke.

It was recognised that any attempt to surprise Grey Somerled during daylight was foredoomed to failure. So, a plot was laid to circumvent him during the night-time. His enemies entered into a conspiracy with one of the servants that she should allow them to invade Dun Gallain after he had fallen asleep. When they arrived, one of their number relieved the woman at the quern, and proceeded to turn the stone without intermission. But he was not too skilful at

the turning; and his harsh and irregular grinding soon woke the sleeper. Ere Grey Somerled had had time to consider the matter of resistance, his foes were upon him. They carried him away from Dun Gallain; and tradition in the islands of Argyll has it that, in great privation, he spent the remainder of his days in a bee-hive house of stone, situated on the farm-lands of Machrins.

One night—so the story concludes—a huge boulder from the roof of the bee-hive fell in, killing its unhappy inmate. So as to identify the spot where this tragedy happened, the islanders raised on it the cairn now indicated on the Ordnance Survey Map, as *Carn Shomhairle Liath*—that is to say, Grey Somerled's Cairn.

CHAPTER XXI

WITCH TALES AND THE EVIL EYE

COMPARATIVELY speaking, witch tales are not common throughout the Highlands and Islands. They are by no means as numerous as are faery tales, or tales of the water-horse, for instance. In the Hebrides only a few tales of witches and witchcraft survive; and these in the main are but variations of witch tales to be found elsewhere on the mainland.

Of all the Islands, Skye is perhaps the one with the most interesting witch lore. Somewhat more than half a century ago—in 1880, to be precise—these elusive hags were causing considerable commotion on that Island. In the autumn of that year, certain leading members of the Free Kirk at Uig petitioned against a mother and daughter who "by evil arts take the milk from the neighbours' cows." An office-bearer of the same congregation made a solemn declaration a year later, before a justice of the peace at Uig, that a sinister woman dwelling next door to him was in the habit of bewitching everything he possessed.

The Three Witches of Camustianavaig.

There lived in the township of Camustianavaig three witches, whom the natives of Skye consulted whenever they wished to do a bad turn to anyone toward whom they felt inimical; and from all accounts these witches were seldom loth to allow themselves to be hired for this purpose.

The story is still told in Skye of the skipper of a well-found fishing boat, who was desirous of having his revenge on a rival crew. One evening, therefore, when his boat was anchored at Portree for revictualling purposes, he took the opportunity of wandering off to Camustianavaig to confer with the witches. On arrival at their house, he discovered that only two of the witches were at home. Anxious to

avoid delay, he deemed it advisable to get down to business at once. In any case, no one knew when the third witch was likely to return from her nocturnal exploits elsewhere on the island. So the skipper drew out the customary bottle of whisky; and forthwith he and the two witches commenced their deliberations. A protracted discussion now ensued. Not until the bottle was drained to the last drop did the skipper begin to give a thought to the journey that separated him from his boat at Portree, and to what excuse he would have to make to the crew for his absence. As he was on the point of leaving, in walked the third witch. That the conference had taken place behind her back made her angry enough, indeed: that there should stand on the table an empty whisky bottle utterly infuriated her! No explanation would appease her. The more her sister witches and the skipper attempted to explain themselves, the more obstreperous did she become. And she swore that she would thwart any plan to which they had agreed. The skipper now felt that his interview with the Camustianavaig witches might be his undoing; and so he returned to his vessel, feeling very uncomfortable about the whole affair.

On the following evening he was sailing his craft past Camustianavaig before a light breeze; and the Skye folks were herding their cattle on the slopes of Ben Tianavaig as he steered for the fishing grounds. Of a sudden there arose a black squall that enveloped his boat. "And, if you are not believing me," said the credulous native who told me this witch tale in Skye a few years ago, "you have merely to sail from Portree to Cumustianavaig with a west wind to experience such a squall, even on the calmest day!"

Furthermore, my story-teller informed me that in his youth he had been under the influence of one of the witches on a certain occasion. He and some of his companions had been fishing out from Camustianavaig when, having set several barrels of nets, they had to run for the harbour to avoid a sudden change in the weather. At daybreak the fishers set out to examine their nets; but their sailing was hindered because one of their number had failed to turn up. Two of the crew, now weary of waiting, went off to the

house in which their dilatory companion lived. They discovered that the landlady still had to prepare breakfast for her lodger. They pleaded with her that she should waste no time, as they were anxious to draw in the nets they had set the previous evening.

"You need be in no hurry to-day," she coolly retorted, "for you won't be getting your nets for several days to come." And she added by way of consolation that, when they *did* recover their nets, they would find that in no way were they damaged.

Regardless of what she had said, the fishermen made an attempt to reach the fishing-grounds, only to be compelled once more to beat hastily for shelter at Camustianavaig. When the seas had subsided after several days of tumult, the teller of this story got word that the nets in question had been sighted a mile or two beyond Ollach, in the Braes of Portree. He and his companions now sailed out to look for them; and they duly recovered them in perfect condition, as foretold.

Their friend's landlady proved to be one of the Camustianavaig witches!

The belief that witches had the power of raising storms at sea was by no means confined to the fisher-folks of the Highlands and Islands. As late as 1590, a certain Agnes Sampson, commonly known as "the wise wife of Keith," was beheaded, having deponed in the presence of King James VI. and his Council that, while the King was returning from Denmark with his bride, she seized a cat, christened it, and then "bound to each part of that cat the chiefest parts of a dead man and several joints of his body." And she confessed, moreover, that on the following night she and her witch companions sailed out in their baskets into the Firth of Forth, cast the cat into the midst of the sea, "and so left the said cat right before the town of Leith."

And it was declared that, as the direct result of these acts, there arose a storm that swamped a vessel conveying precious jewels and sundry gifts that were to have been presented to the new Queen of Scotland, when she disembarked at Leith.

The Fate of a Confiding Son.

Upon a time there stood on the moor between Dunvegan and Stein, in the Vaternish district of Skye, a haunted house, with which is associated the following witch tale. In this house there dwelt a woman and her son. One day, while the woman was out at the peats and her son was snoozing on the wooden settle that to this day forms so indispensable a part of the furniture of an island home, three black cats entered by the window, and immediately took the shape of women. Their visit was with evil intent: they had made their way into the house as cats, so as to conceal their identity.

There now followed a prolonged discussion; and it was only when their deliberations were drawing to a close that the witches realised the son on the settle had been feigning sleep all the time, and had overheard their malevolent scheme. Thereupon one of them addressed him sternly, and warned him not to repeat a word they had uttered, adding that, if he did so, he would suffer for it. Immediately they had intimidated the boy into promising that he would not give them away, the three witches again assumed the form of cats, and left the house as they had entered.

Now, the boy, when he thought that all likelihood of the witches carrying out their threat was passed, told their evil secret to his mother, who in turn vowed that she would never mention the matter to a soul. However, some time afterwards a violent dispute ensued between the mother and one of the witches, in the course of which the former completely lost her head, and said something that convinced the witch that the boy had broken his word.

That night the three witches met, and arranged to waylay the boy in the dark. Their ambush was successful, and there was found between the Faery Bridge and Stein the lifeless body of the unhappy lad. "And, if you're not believing me," emphasised the artless raconteur who gave me this witch tale, "there's a sign on the roadside between the Faery Bridge and Stein to prove it!"

Soon afterwards the folks of the neighbourhood raised a cairn to mark the spot where the foul deed had been

committed; but to-day the *Carn a' Ghille*, or Lad's Cairn, is not to be seen. The belief is that it may have sunk down into the peaty soil, and gradually disappeared from view. But the spot is said to be haunted; and even yet children, who have been told the story of the three witches, hesitate to pass this way after nightfall. In fact, I have met elderly people in Skye who deliberately avoid this crossing-place in the dark, when possible. But most overland traffic between Dunvegan and Vaternish must of necessity cross at this point.

The Drowning of Iain Gareh.

It was through the schemings of witches that one of the MacLeods of Raasay lost his life. This MacLeod was greatly disliked by the Skye witches, because he was wont to deal out rough justice to them when they defaulted in any way. Eventually they arranged to assemble by the shore at the Narrows of Raasay, not far from the Braes, and to watch for his galley when it was likely to be sailing between his island home and Portree. This they did; and on one occasion, when they perceived his boat to be a convenient distance from the shore, a picked contingent of them was transformed into cats, and made for the boat. By huddling together at the poop, they capsized it. Thus MacLeod was drowned. Thereafter the cats swam ashore in great exultation, and once more resumed their human appearance.

Witchcraft is also believed to have encompassed the death of that dauntless member of the family of MacLeod of Raasay called Iain Garbh. An entry in the year, 1671, in the *Polichronon,* that most illuminating record of the Highlands written during the seventeenth century by James Fraser, minister of Wardlaw, throws the following contemporary light on the untimely death of Iain Garbh MacLeod of Raasay :—

> "This April the Earle of Seaforth duelling in the Lewes, a dreedful accident happened. His lady being brought to bed there, the Earle sent for John Garve M'kleud of Rarsay, to witness the christning; and, after the treat and solmnity of the feast, Rarsay takes leave to goe home, and, after a

rant of drinking uppon the shoare, went aboord off his birling and sailed away with a strong north gale off wind; and whither by giving too much saile and no ballast, or the unskillfulness of the seamen, or that they could not mannage the strong Dut(ch) canvas saile, the boat whelmd, and all the men dround in view of the cost. The Laird and 16 of his kinsmen, the prime, perished; non of them ever found; a grewhound or two cast ashoare dead; and pieces of the birling. One Alexander Mackleod of Lewes the night before had voice warning him thrice not to goe at (all) with Rarsay, for all would drown in there return; yet he went with him, being infatuat, and dround (with) the rest. This account I had from Alexander his brother the summer after. Drunkness did the (mischeife)."

The story is told in the Isles that a raven flew ominously round Iain's boat while he was returning across the Minch from Stornoway. The raven eventually settled on the gunwale; and Iain Garbh drew his dirk in an attempt to kill it. But he missed the mark; and so colossal was his strength that the point of the dirk clove the timbers instead, with the result that the boat rapidly sank with all hands.

The raven, they say, was a witch in disguise, who had been hired by Iain's stepmother. She was inimical toward him, as stepmothers often are toward stepchildren who have inherited what they coveted for their own children.

But Donald Gorm of Sleat is said to have had a hand in the drowning of Iain Garbh MacLeod of Raasay to the extent that he promised the witch a profitable stretch of land in Trotternish, if she carried out his directions.

In the folk-lore of Skye, the witch's name is given as Morag. When Donald Gorm made his offer to her, she retired to the seclusion of her peat-fire, and sat over it for several hours in deep meditation. Then she summoned her daughter, and directed her to bring a large tub from the byre, and to fetch water from the well. The tub was duly filled to the brim. Thereafter Morag set an egg-shell afloat in the tub. Then she betook herself to a high hill in the neighbourhood, overlooking the sea, where for three days and three nights she watched for the coming of Iain Garbh's birlinn. About noon on the fourth day, she recognised the

birlinn approaching under a favourable wind. When it came fairly close inshore, she rushed home and instructed her daughter to stir the water in the tub. Soon it was noticed by those assembled by the shore, awaiting Iain Garbh's arrival, that the birlinn was in serious straits. A squall enveloped her; and she sank with all hands. And the natives of Skye used to say that, on the anniversary of Iain Garbh's drowning, the incoming tide always made a great commotion just at the spot where he and his men fell victim to witchcraft.

But some time afterwards the witch and Donald Gorm fell out. Not long after the drowning of Iain Garbh, she herself was found drowned by the shore of Raasay; and the folks of Skye and of the adjacent Isles had a shrewd suspicion that Donald Gorm was responsible.

A Witch Caught Red-footed.

There once lived in the Sleat of Skye a dairymaid who was continually pestered by a cat that, for its size, had an abnormal capacity for milk. For years this creature had been helping itself to milk; and every precaution to exclude it from the dairy proved futile. Futile, too, were all attempts to capture it.

At last the long-suffering dairymaid was able to get her revenge, for one day the cat, having consumed so much milk that it scarcely could crawl, was caught red-footed! With a chopper that lay to hand, the dairymaid chopped off one of its ears.

Not long afterwards she was aghast at finding that a woman living but a few doors away had lost an ear. And so ashamed of herself was the victim that she never ventured across her own threshold except when her head was completely covered by a plaid or shawl.

Shod with Horse-shoes.

Loch Bracadale also has its witch story. Angus, the favourite man-servant of the tacksman of Ullinish, had an extraordinary experience. At all times he and his employer were the best of friends; but, albeit they had the utmost confidence in one another, Angus was loth to tell his master

why he always looked so tired before the day's work began. In course of time the state of Angus's health gave the tacksman so much concern that he approached him in a fatherly way, and persuaded him to reveal the cause of his condition. And it transpired that poor Angus was the dupe of a woman whom he declared to have been a witch. When at night he came in from his work and was eager to lie down and rest, she used to throw a halter round his neck and transform him into a horse, on whose back she galloped all over Skye to attend witch meetings during the night-time. They never returned until morning, with the result that Angus was usually too tired to be able for his daily routine about the farm. Angus's story greatly perturbed the tacksman of Ullinish; and so, without breathing a word to anyone, he and Angus decided that the next time the witch came on the scene, Angus would take the bridle forcibly from her, and reiterate to her the phrases she had been in the habit of repeating when transforming him into a horse. Furthermore, the tacksman instructed Angus to shoe her with real horse-shoes immediately she was changed, and to restore her to her normal condition after he had had a jaunt with her round the countryside.

That very night, to be sure, the witch again was at her black art. Angus did not fail to carry out the instructions he and the tacksman of Ullinish had agreed upon. Next morning, when the family was assembling for breakfast, the tacksman kept on wondering and wondering why his wife was so long in making her appearance. When at length he went to look for her, he found her ill in bed. So he straightway sent for a physician, who on arrival discovered a pair of horse-shoes so firmly nailed to her feet that they could not be removed.

And before long the tacksman was lamenting the loss of his wife who, to his amazement, had been practised in the Black Art.

The Three Banshees.

Upon a time there lived at Rudh' an Dunain, in western Skye, a certain Norman MacSweyn. Norman was shepherd to the tacksman of Rudh' an Dunain, who leased extensive

stretches of moorland in the locality of Glen Bretil, and owned large flocks of sheep. One day Norman's wife chanced to be reclining in a dreamy way on her bed, while her young child was seated on the lap of a kindly neighbour, who crooned to it by the fire. The neighbour, too, was feeling a little drowsy; and before long she was quite overcome with the sleep induced by the warmth of the fire.

Now, the mother, though dovering, was sufficiently awake to be conscious of everything that was going on around her. On glancing casually in the direction of the fire, she espied to her amazement three little women gathered round the sleeping neighbour and the babe. They secretly had entered the house. Unable to recognise them, she concluded that they were banshees bent on mischief. Nor was she far wrong, for she overheard the senior of them whisper to the one standing near her: "Raise the babe, and we'll depart with it!"

"Oh!" she heard the other banshee say, "leave with the poor woman MacSweyn this one babe, as already you have had so many of her children!"

It was not until then that the third banshee broke silence by expressing a similar desire, having taken pity on the poor mother.

Angry, indeed, was the senior banshee that her sisters had thwarted her plan. To their suggestion that the child should be left, she responded: "If, then, I must yield to your entreaties, we will not bear the child away; but this I declare —when the *caoran* (a little peat) I see smouldering on the hearth before me shall be burned out, the child will surely die."

The three banshees then crept out of the house. Little did the neighbour know of what had taken place during her snooze. But, no sooner had the banshees taken their departure than the mother of the child, having listened breathlessly to their conversation and altercation, rose speedily and poured over the fire the content of a large jorum that stood near by. The sodden *caoran,* to which the banshee had referred, she snatched off the hearth; and, having wrapped it carefully in a cloth, she hid it in a kist, and thereafter returned to bed.

Years passed, during which the child—Oighrig MacSweyn by name—grew into a beautiful young woman, who eventually plighted her troth. Those were the days when the now ruined and moss-covered parish church at Eynort was the place of worship to which all the Glen Bretil folks went: those were the days, moreover, when in the Isles the bride-to-be did not attend church between the time of her betrothal and her marriage. It was a long, long way from Rudh' an Dunain to service at Eynort; but Norman MacSweyn and his old wife thought nothing of a twelve-mile tramp to church, even in the most inclement weather. And anyone familiar with the locality of Glen Bretil knows how fiercely the storm can rage in this part of Skye!

Well, one Sabbath, when Norman and his wife had gone over to worship at Eynort, Oighrig was tempted to examine the contents of the kist that for so many years her mother had guarded so jealously. Having forced it open, she teemed out everything, until she found at the bottom of the kist a strange piece of cloth, in which was wrapped a *caoran*, or little peat. Oighrig could not conceive what had possessed her mother to keep in her kist such a common thing as a *caoran*, for, apart from the fact that it would burn, she knew of no other use to which it might be put—though, by the way, a little peat frequently is used in the Hebrides as a nucleus round which wool or yarn is wound. And, therefore, Oighrig innocently threw the *caoran* on the hearth, where it soon became ignited. As it continued to smoulder away, she began to feel increasingly ill. When the folks returned from church at Eynort, they found their beautiful daughter in the grip of death, and the kist lying open beside her, its precious contents all scattered higgildy-piggildy about the room. Nowhere to be seen was the *caoran* that the wicked banshee had cursed; and ere long the fate, that by her mother's presence of mind had been avoided in her infancy, overtook Oighrig. And she was laid to rest in the old burying-ground at Eynort.

A Mother's Prudence.

The folk-tale of the three scheming banshees, who visited the shepherd's wife at Rudh' an Dunain, recalls one

associated with a shepherd and his wife, who dwelt in a lonely bothy among the Mountains of Mull.

One night the wife's labours began unexpectedly; and she urged her husband to hasten for assistance to the nearest human habitation—but not before she had directed him to place by the bed-side a table, to put on the table such food as the bothy contained, to place the reaping-hook on the window-sill, and the smoothing iron in front of the bed.

The child was delivered ere the shepherd returned with help. Immediately after its birth, the mother overheard one invisible being whisper instructions to another to abduct the infant.

"How can I," responded the other, "when there's iron by the bed, and iron by the window, and on the table butter that was made from the milk of a cow that ate the pearly *mothan?*"

When eventually the shepherd returned to find that the child had been born in his absence, and listened to his wife's account of the whisperings she had overheard, he was indeed glad that she had been so prudent for the child's safety.

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Authorities are uncertain (as indeed all accepted authorities always are!) as to what plant the Gaelic name, *mothan,* was applied to. The sandwort or the bog-violet are suggested by Alexander Carmichael in *Carmina Gadelica.* Anyway, the person carrying this plant, or having drunk the milk of a cow that had eaten it, was regarded as immune from harm. That the *mothan* was used even in Strathspey and in Glen Urquhart is shown by the following quotation from Stewart's *Highland Superstitions and Amusements:*

> "Go to the summit of some stupendous cliff or mountain where any species of quadruped never fed nor trod, and gather of that herb in the Gaelic language called *mothan,* which can be pointed out by any 'wise' person. The herb you will give to a cow, and of the milk of that cow you are to make a cheese, and whoever eats of that cheese is for ever after, as well as his gear, perfectly secure from every species of fairy agency."

The *mothan* had occult powers not unlike those vested in St. John's wort. It ensured to its possessor protection against fire, and against the risk of being carried away either by witches or by the Little Folk. In olden times one of the commonest means of seeking protection against witchcraft and faery influence was to consume a bit of cheese made from the milk of a cow that had been given some *mothan* to eat.

Faeries were believed to be most prone to commit nefarious acts on the nights immediately preceding Beltane, the first day of summer according to the ancient method of reckoning, and also on the nights preceding Hallowmass. So it was usual about this time to give the cows a little *mothan* to eat, if such were procurable.

And there is an old saying in the Isles that, when a man makes a miraculous escape from death, he must have drunk of the milk of a cow that ate the *mothan*. The Isleswomen used to sew a fragment of it in their bodices; and the Islesmen often carried a spring of it in the left pocket of a vest.

And they say in the Isles, too, that when Red Roderic, son of Ranald of the Lewis, was on his way to be tried before the sheriff at Lochmaddy, an old woman in Benbecula gave him a sprig of "the blessed *mothan*" that grew in South Uist. Consequently, Red Roderic was acquitted, "although he was as guilty of the guilt as the son of a sinner."

This instance is referred to by Carmichael in *Carmina Gadelica*—

"But, Christina, why did you give the *mothan* to the man, when you knew that he was guilty? I think myself it was not right of you to go and do it."

And thus replied Christina: "O food and clothing! thou dear one of my heart, and thou loved one of my people, I could not myself go and refuse him. He beseeched to me, and he swelled to me, and he vowed to me, and he placed a thing in my hand. And, oh! King of the Moon and of the Sun and of the beautiful, sublime Stars! what could I myself say or do, and the bad man in his black trouble, in his red difficulty, and in his hard plight?"

The belief that a sprig of the *mothan* acted as a charm

was widespread throughout the Highlands and Islands during the eighteenth century; and even to this day there are old folks in the Hebrides who put their trust in this plant, or in the protective virtue of the milk of a cow which they know to have eaten of it. And they say in the Isles that many a man carried a fragment of the *mothan* to Culloden.

It was held, moreover, that the eating of the *mothan* tended to increase one's powers of language. There is a story told of two faeries on St. Kilda, who, on coming upon a woman rocking her infant in a cradle, deprived the woman of the power of speech. Then one faery was heard to say to the other: "We must give to this child the gift of the tongue, for he has drunk of the milk of a cow that ate the *mothan.*"

The *mothan* was by no means the only plant believed to be possessed of the power of warding off evil, or alternately of bringing luck. But it was held that some plants were of no avail unless they were found *gun iarraidh*—that is to say, without searching for them. Only when the four-leaved shamrock and the four-leaved clover were discovered by accident, as it were, did they 'charm' the finder in time of stress or danger.

The rowan or mountain-ash was looked upon as sacred; and it was customary to fasten a sprig of it over the lintel of a homestead, in order to protect the inmates from the influences of evil spirits, the evil eye, and witchcraft generally. Sometimes an ash twig was placed in or under a milk-pail, to ensure that the substance would not be extracted from the milk by malevolent agencies. A sprig of bramble was also used for this purpose. Sometimes a piece of ivy was nailed over the byre door in the belief that not only did it prevent witches from putting an evil spell on the cows, but that it also protected the cows against such diseases as murrain.

How Graham of Menteith obtained Wine for his Guests.

In Menteith there is a tale told of how Graham of that Ilk came by the finest wine that ever graced his table. His

wine-cellars had run dry; and, as he was expecting a number of guests, he sent forth his butler with an empty cask to obtain, as best he could, its fill of wine. As the butler was passing by the reedy shore of the Lake of Menteith, weary with the weight of the cask, two local witches, each seated astride a sheaf of bulrushes by the edge of the lake, beckoned to him. To the witches' beckoning he responded; and to their enquiry he explained the object of his journeying through the countryside with a toom cask. In a trice he found himself mounted irresistibly on another sheaf of bulrushes, and he holding on with grim determination to the cask. Willy-nilly, the witches escorted him through the ether to the wine-cellars beneath the palace of the King of France, where they urged him to fill his cask to its utmost capacity.

And thus it was that the butler returned to the table of his master, Graham of Menteith, with wine, the excellence of which drew green envy from the guests.

It is said, moreover, that the butler also brought back with him to Menteith a silver drinking-cup, on which was engraved the *fleur-de-lys* of France.

Loch of the Sword.

Perhaps one of the best known witch tales in Scotland is that associated with a small loch lying a mile or so to the north of Rannoch Station, in the very heart of Scotland, exactly where the boundaries of the three great counties of Inverness, Argyll, and Perth meet. The loch, which is of no great dimensions, goes by a Gaelic name meaning the Loch of the Sword; and as such it is shown on the map.

It is related that, about three centuries ago, there arose between representatives of the family of Atholl and Locheil, Chief of the Clan Cameron, a dispute as to the ownership of some lands in the neighbourhood. Wellnigh every means of settlement had been exhausted; and the two clans, weary of continual warfare, eagerly sought to compose their difference by mutual agreement. So, after a considerable amount of fruitless strife, Atholl and the worthy Chief of the Camerons arranged that they would meet one another

alone on a certain day by the loch aforementioned, and there endeavour to arrive at a peaceful solution in regard to the lands in dispute.

When the appointed day arrived, and Locheil was on his way to the place where he had promised to meet Atholl, he was accosted on the moor by a frail and agèd woman, who asked him: "Where are your men, Locheil? Where are your men, Locheil?"

To her question the Chief paid little attention, and turned quietly toward her and said: "Hold thy peace, old witch! I have no need for my gallant men to-day, for I travel to a loch where Atholl has agreed to meet me alone."

So Locheil continued on his way. But the old woman limped after him, and, having seized hold of his tartan plaid, persisted in interrogating him again, for she felt that, if the Chief of the Camerons intended proceeding unaccompanied to the loch, he might find himself in danger. "Where are your men, Locheil? Where are your men?" she kept on repeating.

Locheil now began to feel a little perturbed by her insistence; and he realised that, if anything unforeseen were to occur when he came face to face with Atholl, he would never forgive himself for ignoring the warning. And, therefore, he hurried off to the nearest clachan and collected a band of men, that he might be prepared in the event of any emergency. This bodyguard he directed to follow after him, and to conceal itself among the bracken and heather by the side of the loch, lest he should require its assistance.

In course of time the two chiefs met face to face; but their efforts to come to terms produced naught but wrath and acrimony. Atholl was determined not to yield an inch of the territory in dispute; and any suggestion that he should merely exasperated him. When he found that he could endure things no longer, he waved his hand, whereupon there leapt up from the heather, in which they had concealed themselves beforehand, twenty stalwart Atholl Highlanders.

"Who are these?" angrily enquired Locheil.

"Oh!" replied Atholl with a smile of disdain, "these are Atholl wethers who have come to graze on Locheil's pastures."

Now Locheil had arranged with his men that, whenever he required their help, he would expose the inside of his cloak. This he now did; and instantly three score of his warriors came dashing down the hillside to the scene of the rivalry, and eagerly awaited instructions from their chief.

"Who are these, Locheil?" asked Atholl, now speechless with surprise.

"Ah, these are Locheil's dogs," responded the Chief of the Clan Cameron. "They are sharp of tooth and famishing; and, what's more, they are indeed keen to sample the flesh of your Atholl wethers. You must renounce your claim to these lands instantly, for I cannot hold these fierce creatures by the chain much longer!"

As the result of this alarming episode the chiefs, without further delay, came to terms in favour of Locheil. And Atholl, having drawn his sword from its sheath, kissed it, swung it over his head, and pitched it into the loch, declaring in so doing that the lands in dispute would belong to Locheil until such time as the sword might be recovered.

While fishing in *Lochan a' Chlaidheimh,* the Lochan of the Sword, about the beginning of the nineteenth century, a schoolboy accidentally dragged the basket-hilted claymore up again, and handed it over to the parish minister. But the men of Locheil were so alarmed, on learning that the sword had been found, that they pleaded with the minister to deliver it up to them, so that they might deposit it in the loch once more. To their wish the minister conceded; and, so, to this very day Atholl's sword lies in this loch, which is little more than a moorland tarn.

Such is the story of the Loch of the Sword, where Atholl discreetly surrendered his claim to the lands—"through summer's heat and winter's cold."

Gormul of Moy.

The previous tale recalls another witch story connected with one of the Camerons of Locheil, testifying to the belief that a witch or an evil spirit or the Evil Eye could not exert an untoward influence across water, particularly across tidal or running water.

There was a feud of long standing between Black Sir Ewen Cameron of Locheil and the MacKintosh of Moy over some lands in Lochaber. Feeling between the two clans became so intense that the notorious witch, Gormul of Moy, determined that she would circumvent Locheil by fair means or by foul. Weary days dragged on, during which Gormul sat, like Tam o' Shanter's wife, "nursing her wrath to keep it warm." Running water separated her from Locheil; and she knew he was aware of its efficacy against witchery. Dauntless as was Black Sir Ewen, and never far to seek in the hour when prowess was needed, he always kept out of Gormul's way, and saw to it that a stream or burn of some sort constantly protected him against her evil designs.

There came a day when Black Sir Ewen Cameron of Locheil was returning from a Mòd at Inverness, and Gormul descried him on the far horizon. Imagining that at last had come the opportunity for which she had waited so patiently, she hastened to shorten the distance between them.

"Step on, belovèd Ewen!" said Gormul, when she reached within a few paces of Locheil.

"Step on thyself, carlin!" responded Locheil. "And, if it be necessary to take the step, a step beyond thee for Ewen."

Black Sir Ewen still had a goodly way to travel ere he reached his abode, and he one of the smartest fellows on his feet in all the Highlands at the time. Yet, he realised the danger he was in, and pressed forward with as little indication as possible of his fear. He was striding homeward at his best pace, thinking that he would out-tire the witch ere he arrived at his destination. But, as the Gaelic chronicler puts it, the witch, far from showing exhaustion, was keeping up with him simply by taking "the footstep of a cock on a gentle autumn evening, when his crop is full."

"Step on, thou belovèd Ewen!" repeated Gormul of Moy. "And oh! King Goileam and King Geigean! Long, indeed, since that day!"

"Step on thyself, carlin!" retorted Locheil a second

time. " And, if the step must be taken, a step beyond thee for Ewen."

And it was when Black Sir Ewen Cameron realised he was in the darkest danger that he remembered the protective power of running water. So, he leapt into the middle of the nearest stream. Then cried Gormul in her bitterness that the foe of her clan had eluded her after all.

" The wish of mine heart to thee, Locheil, thou best loved of men." To which Locheil replied : " The wish of thine heart, carlin, be on yonder grey stone."

Thereat a large, grey boulder, to which Locheil had pointed with his sword, was rent in twain, as by magic. And from that day Gormul, the witch of Moy, abandoned her endeavours to destroy Black Ewen Cameron of Locheil.

The Power of a Live Cinder.

It was believed that a live coal or a smouldering peat, taken from a fire for the purpose of kindling a fire in another house, had certain occult properties, except when it had to be conveyed across water. Often a woman would take a kindling from her neighbour's fire, to enable her to ' spirit ' the substance out of her neighbour's milk, or to extract the butter from her neighbour's churn. The folk-lore of the Scottish Highlands and Islands is full of reference to the manner in which witches and those possessed of the Evil Eye put a spell on the milk, or rendered a churning of no avail, and even separated the web from the warp after a weaving. Apropos the belief in the supernatural power emanating from a kindling taken from the fire in a neighbour's house, the following folk-tale used to be recited about sixty years ago by a cottar in Barra.

The mother of a crofter family in the Isle of Skye toiled with her churn in the ben of her house. Seated in the but on the meal-girnel, cross-legged-wise, after the fashion of his craft, was the local tailor, sewing clothes for the sons, who were out on the moor at the peat-cutting. Meanwhile a woman from a neighbouring croft came in and asked for a kindling for her fire. No sooner had she got the kindling and departed with it than the tailor leapt down from the

meal-girnel and, lifting a red peat out of the fire, dropped it in the water stoup under the table. He then resumed his position upon the meal-girnel, and went on with his sewing. A little later the woman returned for another kindling, saying that the first kindling had failed to light her fire. Again the tailor slipped down from the meal-girnel when she had gone, and put another live peat in the water stoup. A third time she came for a kindling on the pretext that the second kindling had proved as useless as the first; and a third time the tailor, when she had departed, put a live peat in the stoup, and then continued with his sewing as though he had never left the meal-girnel.

Sorely distressed was the mother of the family when, toward evening, she discovered that she had been churning all day long, and not an ounce of butter in the churn. "Och, och!" she said, "I have been at the churning since early day; and the arms of me are weary. And there's not yet a cat's-lick of butter in the churn. I'll never hear the end of this when the men come in from the peats."

"A woman came three times for a kindling," interposed the tailor; "and she knowing you were at the churning. When she went, I put three live cinders in the stoup under the table. Put your hand into the stoup, and you will find the butter."

Thrice the woman placed her hand in the stoup under the table; and thrice she drew out a great lump of butter "as fresh and fair and fragrant as the beauteous buttercups in their prime."

The Evil Eye in Glen Lyon.

The strange manner in which the boulder, toward which Black Ewen Cameron of Locheil pointed his sword, was rent in twain as by magic, recalls the following well authenticated tale of the Evil Eye.

A farmer's wife in Strathtay, who came originally from Glen Lyon, had a cousin, Jean, who at one time was dairy-maid on one of the estates in the latter glen. Now, the laird of this place had the very sinister reputation of casting the Evil Eye not only on the things he coveted, but also on his

own possessions. When he approached his own byre, his farm-servants used to edge him away, because, if once he got into the byre and admired a cow, her milk was observed to "go wrong on her."

One day Jean was driving the cows out to the fields, carrying in her arms a small kebbuck of cheese, wrapped in a sack, when she beheld her employer coming toward her. There was no possibility of her avoiding him. So, taking advantage of a bend in the road, she hurriedly hid the cheese among the bracken, put a large stone inside the sack instead, and then placed herself at the head of the procession of cows. As her laird appeared round the bend, he fixed his eyes on the sack.

"That's surely a fine cheese you have there, Jean," he remarked.

"Indeed, it is, sir," she replied, meanwhile engaging his attention for a few moments, in order to enable the cows to slip unnoticed up the road.

When all the cows were safely past, Jean moved off after them at a pace which did not leave her any great distance to cover, when she found it possible to return to the spot where she had hidden the cheese. Directly the laird was out of sight, she ran back for the cheese; and, when shaking the stone out of the sack, she found it was cracked through and through by the Evil Eye! By her wit, however, she had saved both the cows and the cheese from harm.

I had this story from a friend, who very recently had it from the farmer's family, who in turn had had it from Jean. One of the sons of this family is well versed in tales of queer happenings. If he be told of any odd occurrence, he nods his head, knowingly, and says: "That will be the ma-agic!"

This family, in addition to its believing in the Evil Eye and the like, maintains a great faith in the old cures. The male members of it, for example, always take a lame horse to stand in a pool among sphagnum moss; and, whenever possible, they use snake-skins as bandages.

CHAPTER XXII

GHOST TALES AND HAUNTED PLACES

AS in all parts of the world where tradition and superstition linger, belief in ghosts remains firmly established in the Scottish Highlands and Islands. Concurrent with this belief exists the notion that certain places are haunted. Nearly all the ancient castles of Celtic Scotland have their ghost; and the ancestral homes of many Highland families, even when such homes have fallen into ruins, are said to be haunted by the family ghost, as in the case of the Castle of Moy, the stronghold of the MacLaines of Lochbuie, which continues to be the abode of the ghost of Ewen of the Wee Head, a henchman of the MacLaines long, long ago.

Many Highland kirkyards are dreaded because of their ghosts; and several lochs and rivers are avoided by the natives after dark, because phantom anglers have been known to fish them.

The Haunted Country.

About half a century ago, Mr and Mrs Faed of Edinburgh, a well-known artist family, while holidaying in Prince Charlie's Country, decided to call on some friends in the neighbourhood of Glenfinnan. So, as an alternative to taking the high-road, they set out for their destination by a small glen. Ere they had travelled far into this glen, rain began to fall. They came to a point at which two pathways diverged. One continued up the glen: the other seemed to run down to the spot at which the stream flowing through the glen is fordable. At this point stood two men in Highland dress, accompanied by two beautiful deer-

hounds. The men were watching the rising stream, which every moment was becoming less and less fordable. In doubt as to which of the pathways they should pursue as a short-cut to their destination, Mr Faed addressed himself to one of the men, who, in pointing upstream, said: "Your road lies *that* way." At this same moment Mrs Faed paused to pat one of the deer-hounds. For an instant she felt the creature's coat beneath her hand. And then everything changed: men and dogs were gone.

Somewhat alarmed, the Faeds now hurried to their destination. On arrival, their hostess asked them which way they had taken; and they described the glen through which they had passed.

"Oh, then, you came through the Haunted Country!" she replied without any hesitation. And, when they told her of their eerie experience, she informed them that they were by no means the first to encounter such.

The Hidden Ploughshare.

Associated with Lochaber is a ghost tale illustrative of the widely established belief in the protective power of iron and other metals. The presence of iron was regarded as a sure preventive against the wiles and whims of the Little Folk, for instance; and in the Outer Hebrides, even to this day, one comes upon examples of where a horse-shoe or a rusty nail is religiously kept above the lintel or the mantel-shelf, in order to protect the inmates of the house against faery interference, or against the evil eye and similar expressions of the supernatural.

Blacksmiths, because they worked with iron, were considered more immune to harm than were those employed in other directions; and in warfaring times men swore on their dirks because they found in them the piece of cold metal most convenient at the time.

The story is told in Lochaber of a man who, having hidden the iron ploughshare of a neighbour, died without disclosing its whereabouts, with the result that he could not rest in his grave, and continually roamed through the

countryside in ghostly form. A certain man, more courageous than his neighbours, set out one night for the spot where this ghost was seen most frequently. In self protection, he took with him a Bible and a dirk. With the dirk he described a circle on the ground around him, whenever he observed the ghost. This prevented it from approaching any nearer to him. In course of conversation with the ghost, he obtained from him the confession that he had concealed his neighbour's ploughshare at a certain spot, and that not until that ploughshare had been returned to its rightful owner would he be at peace.

Sure enough, the ploughshare was unearthed at the spot indicated. And never thereafter did this ghost scare the folks of Lochaber.

Ghost Light.

When an Edinburgh doctor, who some years ago was staying at an inn at Broadford, went out after supper one evening for a turn along the beach, he noticed far out in the bay a very bright light, which he took to be a flare ignited by fishermen. But the light came smoothly and steadily toward the spot where he was standing. The doctor described it as being like a globe of light, such as one might find on a lamp-standard in an up-to-date city.

Whenever the light touched the shore, it disappeared; and a cloaked woman, bearing a child in her arms, now hurried across the sand in front of him, and vanished in a moment.

The doctor now returned to his quarters, and questioned the innkeeper as to whether he was aware of any strange occurrence that might have accounted for this unearthly experience. With some reluctance the innkeeper told him that, several years earlier, there had been a shipwreck in the bay, and that a woman and child had been cast ashore, dead, on the beach, just at the spot he described.

This weird apparition—if such it may be called—has not been seen often. But the innkeeper stated that occasionally it is observed by the natives of the district about the time of year when the shipwreck aforesaid occurred.

The Loch Light of Rannoch.

A phenomenon of a similar character is associated with Loch Rannoch, where a light in the form of a ball sometimes is seen skimming the surface of the water. This light always rises at the same point, travels the same short distance, and likewise disappears at the same place. On occasions, however, it has been observed to rise from the water, and roll up the hill called Meall-dubh. Only a few years ago the natives of Loch Rannoch-side witnessed this strange loch light.

It may be mentioned here that Loch Ness has its apparition, as well as its monster. It is known to the Highlanders as the Old Man of Inverfarigaig. "The Bodach," as he is called locally, often is seen in the woods among the rocks at Inverfarigaig. But he is oftener heard than seen. In time of winter storm, he can be heard shrieking among the leafless trees fringing Loch Ness at Inverfarigaig.

Two Bright Balls of Fire.

There is a story told in Breadalbain of two *gealbhain,* or balls of fire, which were seen flitting over the face of Loch Tay.

A small farm at Morenish, on Loch Tay-side, was tenanted by a family of the name of Cameron; and, while the eldest son was serving abroad with the army, his two brothers died of fever, and were buried in the churchyard at Kenmore. When the surviving brother came home on furlough, he decided to exhume the coffins containing their remains, and to carry them by water to the other end of Loch Tay, for re-interment at Killin. On the night preceding the day of re-interment, two bright balls of fire were witnessed rolling along the surface of the loch in the very course afterwards followed by the boat conveying the coffins. It is not so very long since there lived in Glen Lochay one of the many natives of this district, who witnessed this weird spectacle.

This recalls another strange fragment, still recounted in

Breadalbain, concerning a ferryman, who lived on the north side of Loch Tay, and who one evening heard a shrill whistle as of someone wanting to cross the loch from the opposite shore. He immediately made for his boat, and rowed over toward the usual ferrying-place on the south side. However, on his arriving there, not a soul did he find. But, as he rested for a moment, an ungainly object, resembling a large sack of wool, came rolling down the brae, and toppled into his boat. Too terrified to examine the nature of his cargo, he proceeded to row home again. Immediately the boat touched the north shore, the ungainly cargo assumed the form of a huge, white bird, which, with a great screeching and flapping of wings, soared away to the burying-place of Lawers.

Only a day or two after this, the ferryman found himself conveying across Loch Tay from the south side the corpse of a young woman who died suddenly, and who was interred duly in the old burying-place of Lawers.

Two Breadalbain Ghosts.

There is told among the clachans fringing the shores of Loch Tay, and indeed throughout Breadalbain, the story of a ghost that haunted the farmhouse of Claggan, on the south side of the loch. On one occasion at least, this ghost, when on its nocturnal errands, assumed the form of a dog. So disturbed became the countryside as the result of ghost rumours, that the inhabitants eventually refused to pass anywhere near Claggan after dusk. One evening an elderly man crossed Loch Tay from the Lawers side, with the intention of paying a visit to his sister, who was married to a tenant-farmer at Ardtalnaig. No sooner had he reached within shouting distance of the farmhouse of Claggan than a huge, grey dog appeared by a heap of stones known locally as *An Carn Mor*, the Big Cairn. The old man did his best to continue his journey without showing any fear; and he observed that the dog moved forward with him in a parallel line, some yards away, that it stopped when *he* stopped, started again when *he* started, and hastened when *he* hastened, for all the world like an ominous

shadow. At length the old man reached Claggan farmhouse, where, in passing by the front, he received some temporary relief on finding that his escort had disappeared. But no sooner had he reached the farther gable than he again was confronted with this eerie creature. Terror-stricken, he turned back, and dashed into the farmhouse, where he fainted in the arms of its occupants.

When he came to, the MacKays, who were tenants of Claggan Farm, addressed him: "What was it frightened you, John? Were you seeing anything?"

John then proceeded to tell them of his experience with the strange dog. By this time he was so unnerved that he asked three or four of the younger men about the farm to escort him the remaining mile of his journey to Ardtalnaig, where his sister lived. But MacKay himself had been so moved by the supernatural nature of John's story that he would not hear of anyone quitting his hearth that night.

Also connected with Breadalbain is the folk-tale of a ghost that attempted to lie its full length in an open coffin, in order to demonstrate to those concerned that the coffin was too short for the corpse for which it was intended. There had died at one of the townships overlooking Loch Tay a man, whose body the local joiner had measured for kisting. On the evening of the day on which the coffin was completed, a footsore and weary beggar came to the joiner's door, seeking a night's shelter. The joiner's wife informed him that, although there was no room available in the house, she had no objection to his spending the night in her husband's workshop, so long as he did not mind the empty coffin lying on the bench. The wood-shavings, she observed, would make a soft, clean bed for him.

The beggar was too weary that night to have any qualms about accepting such an offer on account of an empty coffin; and scarcely a moment was he on his bed of shavings when he noticed a spectre, shrouded in white, climb up on the bench, and attempt to stretch itself out in the coffin that, obviously, was too short for it. The spectre then vanished; and the beggar decided to make the best of his shelter until morning.

"That coffin is too short for the body you want to put in

it!" said the beggar to the joiner on the following morning.

"Why that?" enquired the joiner.

"Well, last night," continued the beggar, "I saw the ghost of the dead man trying to get into it, and he couldn't."

The joiner laughed at the vagrant, to whom he and his wife had given a night's roofing; but, as a matter of interest, he thought he would just measure the corpse again, and compare its length with that of the empty coffin. And, sure enough, as the beggar had indicated, the coffin had to be enlarged.

A Ghost Story from the Isle of Skye.

In the early years of the nineteenth century a Lowland farmer rented a sheep-run in the Isle of Skye; and what time he was not tending his sheep, he was trying to laugh the Gaelic folk out of its belief in ghosts. "It is all very well for you," said the Gaelic folk, "to be laughing at us because of our belief in ghosts; but, if you care to spend a night in the deserted Big House over there, you will see for yourself that ghosts there are for certain."

The Lowland farmer accepted the challenge. That very night he went across to the Big House, and made himself as comfortable as he could in the dining-room. He lit a big fire for company, locked all the doors, snibbed all the windows, and then sat down to read an old newspaper. At midnight a young and beautiful lady stood before him, as if she had come from nowhere.

"Who are you?" asked the Lowland farmer.

"I am the ghost!" said the lady.

"You're a liar!" said the Lowland, the *very* Lowland, farmer. "There's no such thing as ghosts."

"More's the pity for you," said the lady, "for I came here specially to show you where a chest of gold is hidden."

"Splendid!" said the Lowland, the *very* Lowland, farmer. "Let us go at once, and find the chest."

"That cannot be," said the lady. "Seeing there are no ghosts, how can a ghost show you the hidden treasure?" And she vanished.

To his dying day the Lowland farmer never forgave himself for his not having believed in ghosts.

The Ghost of Donald Gorm.

Perhaps the best known ghost in Skye is that of Donald Gorm MacDonald, which is said to haunt Duntulm Castle, the seat for at least two centuries of the doughty Lords of the Isles. Indeed, it is said that the Castle was abandoned about the year, 1715, because of the haunting ghost of Donald Gorm. In point of fact, the deserting of Duntulm by the MacDonalds has never been explained satisfactorily. Some say the death of a child that fell out of a western window into the sea was regarded by its occupants as an event sufficiently unpropitious to warrant their leaving it; but the explanation more generally accepted is that the MacDonalds dreaded the ghost of their dauntless clansman, Donald Gorm.

Be this as it may, this same ghost proved invaluable on one occasion, and in the following manner. The year after Donald Gorm Mòr was succeeded by his nephew, Donald Gorm Og, an important family document went amissing. On the recovery of this document a great deal depended. Now, about this time there frequently had been seen in the neighbourhood of Duntulm Castle three ghostly forms, which Donald Gorm Og had made many unsuccessful attempts to accost. One day, however, the three forms were observed to enter the Castle. A local wiseacre now suggested that seven men, bearing seven staves with fire at their ends, should follow them. This suggestion was adopted without delay; and whom did the seven men discover in the wine-cellar but Donald Gorm and two carousing clansmen! On his being questioned as to the whereabouts of the missing document, Donald Gorm instructed them as to where it was to be found.

The Ghost of Ewen of the Wee Head.

The people of Mull say that, when death is about to overtake any member of the family of the MacLaines of

Lochbuie, a ghostly form lacking a head, and mounted on a ghostly mare, may be seen prancing round the Castle of Moy, their ancient stronghold by the shores of Loch Buie. The ghostly form they believe to be that of Ewen of the Wee Head, a redoubtable henchman of the MacLaines in former times.

Some hold that Ewen was a son of the Chief of Lochbuie, and that he lost his head when attempting to wrest the family stronghold and estates from his father. On the day prior to that upon which the partisans of the father came to grips with those of the son, Ewen sought to consult a faery as to how he ought to conduct himself in the struggle then imminent. What advice the faery gave Ewen, we are not told; but it is believed in Mull that Ewen's fate was due to his having declined it. When the onset was at its bitterest, Ewen went galloping madly through his father's forces. It was then that the sweep of an unknown claymore decapitated him, leaving his panic-stricken charger to pursue its crazy career, bearing a headless rider.

Thus ended the feud. And thus it is that, on the eve of the passing of the Chief, or of any other member of the family of the Lochbuie MacLaines, a charger bearing a headless rider is seen galloping down the Great Glen of Mull to the Castle of Moy.

On an islet in one of the many lochs lying in the Great Glen may be traced the ruins of a structure said to have been the keep of the rebellious Ewen.

The Ghost of Dune Tower.

In the Island of Lewis, and at a haunted place near Cellar Head, is situated the little summer residence of Dune Tower. Within an arm's length of its seaward gable, the eeriest of moors terminates abruptly in sea-cliffs, steep and sterile, sheering down to the Hebridean billows, hundreds of feet below. The present dwelling of Dune Tower is believed to occupy the site of an ancient Scandinavian watch-tower. Around this weird place float traditions of the pirates from Lochlann; and they say that in the numerous caverns below Dune Tower the old people used

to conceal themselves from the invaders, who sailed across the northern seas on ravage and plunder intent.

About a furlong to the landward of the cliffs, on the very edge of which stands Dune Tower, are the Bilascleitear shielings, grouped on the sombre sky-line like a mediæval Scots clachan, surrounded by green pastures. For summers immemorial, these shielings have been occupied by people belonging to the village of Lionel, in northern Lewis. Apart from these shielings, which are inhabited only for two or three months each year, there is no dwelling-place within sight of Dune Tower.

A few years ago the owner of the Tower, whom I knew intimately, felt constrained to carry out a number of alterations in its internal economy, consequent upon the ever-growing demand made upon its sleeping accommodation by friends who, in time of summer, visited it from near and far. Two local joiners were commissioned to effect the alterations desired; and they commenced their task at the New Year of 1928. Arrangements were made for their residing at Dune Tower while the necessary work was being undertaken; and a housekeeper was sent over with them to cook their food, and to attend to their personal comfort. One night, while the temporary residents slept, three loud knocks were heard at the front door. Thereupon one of the joiners crept out of bed and, clad in night-attire, sought to interview the nocturnal visitor. But, on opening the door, not a soul could he find. The sea moaned forebodingly against the gaunt, naked cliffs: a waning moon, suspended low over the Bilascleitear shielings, transformed the frosty paddock in front of the house into a carpet of glistening sequins. The man returned to bed; but there was little sleeping among the occupants of Dune Tower *that* long winter's night.

A few nights later their slumbers again were disturbed by a sound as if a heavy bolt had torn its way through the roof, and fallen with a ponderous thud upon the floor. Once more the startled sleepers sought in vain to explain the cause of their rude awakening.

On returning for the week-end to their homes at the township of Lionel, the joiners related these eerie

experiences to their neighbours, who taunted them on learning that they were loth to go back to Dune Tower.

Nevertheless, they returned. One morning, about 4 a.m., they again were alarmed by a noise as though a heavy shell had been discharged from a howitzer entrenched immediately behind the house. The whole place quaked. One of the men leapt out of bed in great terror. He called to the woman, but got no response, since she appears to have gone off into a swound. On the morrow they again left for the week-end, earnestly wishing that the alterations had been completed, so that never again might they have to approach the haunted place.

On the following Monday the two joiners and the housekeeper returned to Dune Tower for the fourth time, doubly intent on finishing the work before the succeeding Friday. About 11 p.m. on the Thursday, however, when the housekeeper opened the door, that she might draw a pailful of water from the barrel at the gable of the house, she was confronted by the figure of a friend who had been dead for six years. The figure, floating toward her in mid-air, was clearly outlined against the darkness by the bright light of a mantle lamp standing in the kitchen window. Hurriedly she slammed the door in the face of the wraith, faintly muttering the words: "O Lord, deliver me!" She swooned on the floor in the small porch. On regaining consciousness, she talked incoherently far into the night. At the first peep of day the two men commenced to labour as they never had laboured before, so that at nightfall they might be able to flee from Dune Tower with the certainty that never again would they be required to return.

And since that time neither ghost nor ghostly sound has disturbed the slumbers of those who are accustomed to cross the moors to Dune Tower.[1]

The Phantom Angler.

And now to a ghost tale that belongs to Sutherland.

Upon a time there resided by the shores of Loch Shin a

[1] For a full account of Dune Tower, see Chapter IX of my book, *The Haunted Isles* (MacLehose, 5/-).

man of substance, certainly so far as flocks and herds were concerned; and this man had a daughter who one evening, while wandering home with a young lad about her own age, observed a phantom angler standing on a stone but a few feet offshore, accompanied by a yellow dog. The angler's back was to the young couple as they neared the side of the loch; and, when they came upon him, the lassie said to the lad: "Call ye to him, and ask whether he has trout, and, if so, whether he will give us a couple for our supper!"

At first the lad feared the consequences of such a question, since the Devil Himself had been known to fish Loch Shin from this very stone. When he had mustered courage, he approached him quietly and asked: "Have ye got fish?"

"And will ye give us a trout or two for our supper?" continued the lassie, ere the fisher could have replied to the previous question put to him.

At sound of human voice, up rose the angler from the stone, and blazed away in a great flame that set fire to the heather by the loch-side. The flames rolled up to the very feet of the young couple. When, terror-stricken, they returned home, they recounted their experience. And it was agreed by all the grown-up folks that the angler they had seen was none other than the Great Mischief Himself!

Ocean of the Spectre.

Long before the MacNeil Chiefs evacuated Kisimul Castle to take up residence at Eoligarry, in the northern peninsula of the Island of Barra, the following folk-tale was prevalent in Mingulay, and indeed throughout the Barra Isles.

In the days before local girls were employed so extensively during the fishing seasons at Castlebay and similar herring-curing ports, it was customary for Barra girls to seek domestic employment in Ireland. In those days there was a continual coming and going between Barra and Ireland. Irish cargo boats, carrying seed potatoes and the like, frequently called at Castlebay; and the captains of these vessels usually were willing to convey over to Erin

such islanders as were eager to go into service in that country.

Now, a girl belonging to the Isle of Pabbay and another from Mingulay had planned secretly that they would avail themselves of the first opportunity offered of going over to Erin. One day, while the Mingulay girl was lifting a creel of peats on her back, she beheld a strange man standing in front of her. How he had come to remote Mingulay without her knowing it was a mystery to her. She passed the time of day with him; and in the course of a brief conversation he referred to the voyage to Erin contemplated by herself and her Pabbay companion. He foretold that, while *she* would settle contentedly in her new surroundings, her Pabbay friend would die in Ireland of fever.

While speaking to the stranger, the Mingulay girl chanced to observe a sailing-vessel some miles off the coast. In a trice this vessel capsized; and all its occupants were precipitated into the sea. Screaming with shock, she strove to draw the stranger's attention to the scene of the fatality. But he assured her that the incident she had just witnessed had no application whatsoever to people then living—the grand-parents of those thrown into the sea, he explained, were not yet born.

When the girl returned home with her creel of peats, she told her people of the interview with a man unknown to her, and of the weird apparition she had beheld. And on the locality, in which she declared the incident to have occurred, her people put the name of *Cuan a' Bhòchdain,* Ocean of Spectre.

About forty years ago a small fishing-vessel capsized in this neighbourhood, and all hands perished.

And now to the sequel.

While stationed in Northern Ireland, a soldier belonging to Barra, and in his day widely known in these parts as the Pearsanach Mòr, deserted the army. In the course of his flight, he came to a cottage that was being re-thatched. Upon entering, he told the housewife that he was a native of the Isle of Barra; and he confessed to his being a military deserter. He pleaded with her to conceal him, since the military police were hot in pursuit of him. The good-

wife hastened out to her husband, who at the time was busy with the thatching of his cottage. As the result of a brief conversation with him, it was decided that the Pearsanach Mòr would be concealed under the thatch until the scare was past.

Barely a minute was the deserter under the thatch when armed men rode up to the cottage, and enquired of the thatcher whether he had noticed a fugitive pass by. To this interrogation they received a reply in the negative. So they sped on in the direction in which they imagined the deserter to have gone. On reaching the point beyond which they knew no human being could have fled in so short a time, they returned to the cottage and insisted on searching it. House, byre, stable, loft were ransacked; but no deserter did they find. Whereupon they gave up the pursuit, and returned to their quarters.

Toward the evening of the same day, the husband opened up the thatch and extricated the Pearsanach Mòr. Now, the goodwife did a certain amount of weaving in her spare moments; and her brother-in-law was a tailor. So, between them, they made a new suit to take the place of the fugitive's uniform, which he already had discarded. And it was while the Pearsanach Mòr sojourned at this cottage in Northern Ireland that he learnt of his hostess that it was she who, as a girl, had seen in the Ocean of the Spectre the extraordinary apparition, of which he had heard tell in his boyhood days. She declared to him that the foretellings of the stranger, who confronted her when creeling peats on Mingulay, had come true—she was settled happily in Ireland, and her Pabbay companion had died of fever years before.

As I have just mentioned, it is only about forty years since the final part of this prophecy was witnessed in the loss in the *Cuan a' Bhòchdain*, in the Ocean of the Spectre, of a fishing-boat with all hands.

The folks of the Barra Isles still affirm that the occupants of this boat were the great-grand-children of a family once living on Mingulay, whose unborn posterity was associated with the accident at the time of its spectral happening.

Truly, this is a ghost tale, and a tale of the "second sight."

A Ghost Story from Kintyre.

In the days that are gone, two Kintyre gentlemen quarrelled over the ownership of a small estate near the Moyle. For a long time they fought each other with words; but in the end they fought with swords, and one of them was slain. Although the victor seized the estate, it troubled him greatly that, search as he might, he could not find the title-deeds anywhere. One night his son, a merry lad, returning home late from a tryst, saw an angry-looking ghost standing at the front door.

"Who are you?" asked the lad.

"I am the ghost of the man whom your father slew, so as to rob me of my estate."

"By your leave, gentleman," said the lad, "this is the proudest moment of my life. My father has told me again and again that you were the very finest swordsman he had ever met, and that, if only your sword had been equal to your skill, *he* would have been the ghost, and *you* the laird."

The ghost was so pleased with the lad's address and courtesy that, there and then, he told him where he might find the title-deeds.

The Inquisitive Ghost.

There was once a ghost in the Isle of Eigg, a wizened, old carlin, who haunted an eerie spot on the king's highway, and asked the passers-by unmannerly questions. One night she met a simple lad from the crofting township.

"Whence have you come?" asked the carlin.

"From my father's house," answered the simple lad.

"And where is your father's house?"

"Where my grandfather built it," answered the simple lad.

"And where did your grandfather build it?"

"Where my father is now staying," replied the simple lad.

"But *where* is your father staying?" continued the carlin.

"In the house which I have just come from."

"And where have you just come from?"

"From my father's house," answered the simple lad.

"But *where* is your father's house?"

"Just where my grandfather built it," answered the simple lad.

And in this wise the unmannerly question and the deft answer went on, the one on the heels of the other, until the cock crew.

The old people say that a godly man went purposely one night to meet the carlin, and that, before she could ask him any questions, he shook the Bible in her face, and that *Gaoth a' Bhiobaill*, the Wind of the Bible, drove her away forever from the Isle of Eigg.

The Washer of the Death-Shrouds.

One of the strangest of all apparitions in the *bean-nighe*, or washing-woman. For one to see the washing of the death-shrouds by the *bean-nighe* in some lonely and remote loch, or in the eerie pool of a river, and sometimes even at a fording-place, was regarded as one of the commonest warnings of death in the Highlands and Hebrides. The *bean-nighe* might be observed by a ford, diligently washing the linen of persons about to be overtaken by death, or folding and beating the linen as it lay on a stone almost entirely submerged in the water.

In Perthshire the washing-woman is described as a creature, small and rotund, and clad in flimsy raiment of emerald hue. The person seeing her, it was held, must not hurry away, but should try to steal up behind her, and surprise her by asking for whom she was washing the death-shrouds.

In Skye, however, she has been likened to a squat creature resembling a small, pitiful child. If caught when "dreeing her weird," she related to her captor what fate awaited him. She responded to all his questionings, if assured that her captor would answer truthfully all questions she, in turn, put to him.

If the person approaching a washing-woman were able to get his hands on her before she either saw or heard him, and she meanwhile engaged with the shrouds, he was able to detain her, and demand of her an answer to his interrogations. If, on the other hand, he was observed or heard by her in his approach, she was able to deprive him of the use of his limbs.

There is a tradition in the Alvie district of Inverness-shire that one of the lochans set in the surrounding hills was the haunt of such a washing-woman. Visible only to those under the shadow of death was this phantom washer of the shrouds. It was held that she represented the disembodied spirit of a mother, who had died in childbirth, and whose garments had not all been washed at the time of her burial. Since death at childbirth was regarded as premature and unpropitious, the phantom washing-woman of Alvie continued to rinse in this lochan the shirts of all those who were fated to die or be killed in battle between the date of the mother's death and the date on which she would have died in the natural course of events.

One of the most popular of Highland stories connected with the washing of the death-shrouds is told of the Mermaid of Loch Slin. On turning a corner on the path by the side of this loch one Sabbath morning, a Cromarty maiden was startled at finding what seemed to be a tall female who, standing in the water just beyond a cluster of flags and rushes, was "knocking claes" on a stone with a bludgeon. On a bleaching-green near at hand she observed more than thirty smocks and shirts, all horribly besmeared with blood. Shortly after the appearance of this apparition, the roof of Fearn Abbey collapsed during worship, burying the congregation in its debris, and killing thirty-six. This accounted for the strange washing by the banks of Loch Slin.

Lad of the Wet Foot.

The story is told in the Isle of Benbecula of the way in which a henchman of *Mac 'ic Ailein nan Eilean*—the

Captain of Clan Ranald of the Isles—was forewarned of the death of his valient and belovéd chieftain. This henchman was known as the *Gille-cas-fluich*, the Lad of the Wet Foot, simply because it was his duty to be walking constantly in front of his master, so as to take the dew or the rain off grass and heather that otherwise would be soaking his master's feet.

Now, it was the Lad of the Wet Foot who, having come on the washing-woman, while she was wailing a death-dirge by one of the Benbecula fords, seized hold of her, and refused to let her go until he learned of her for whom she was washing the death-shroud and singing the dirge.

"Let me go," said she, "and give me the freedom of my feet, and that the breeze of reek coming from thy grizzled tawny beard is anear putting a stop to the breath of my throat. Much more would my nose prefer, and much rather would my heart desire, the air of the fragrant incense of the mist of the mountains."

"I will not allow thee away," replied the Lad of the Wet Foot, "till thou promise me my three choice desires!"

"Let me hear them, ill man!" said the *bean-nighe*.

"That thou wilt tell to me for whom thou art washing the shroud and crooning the dirge, that thou wilt give me my choice spouse, and that thou wilt keep abundant seaweed in the creek of our townland as long as the carle of Sgeirrois shall continue his moaning."

Then answered the *bean-nighe:* "I am washing the shroud and crooning the dirge for Great Clan Ranald of the Isles; and he shall never again in his living life of the world go thither nor come hither across the clachan of Dun Borve."

Instantly the Lad of the Wet Foot grasped the death-shroud, and flung it into the loch. And he hastened home to the stronghold of Dun Borve, home to the bedside of Clan Ranald himself. And he related to his master all that the washing-woman had told him at the stepping-stones by the ford, in the dead of night.

Clan Ranald immediately directed that a cow be killed, and that without delay a new coracle be made with the hide, so that he might be taking a long, long sail—no one knew whither. In no time the coracle was brought to him. And

Clan Ranald of the Isles speedily forsook Dun Borve, carrying the coracle; and he could be seen in the act of paddling himself away and away, out over the loch. And never again, either on moorland or on machar, or by the shore of sea or loch, was the Captain of Clan Ranald seen in human form in Benbecula.

The Strangers of the Plain.

Mention of death and the death-shrouds reminds one of the fact that, if there were one thing elderly or agéd Highlanders and Islanders dreaded more than another, it was the idea that they might die among strangers, and at a distance from their homes. The extent to which this notion still prevails among them is shown by the exertions, both physical and financial, they often make to bring home, sometimes from very far away, the corpse of a relative, so that it may rest finally with the dust of their forbears. Few happenings were regarded as more calamitous than that one should be consigned to the earth among strangers, and away from the care and sympathy of relatives.

An incident illustrative of this is mentioned by General Stewart of Garth in his *Sketches*. A Highland woman, aged ninety-one, and possessed of all her faculties, had left her home in Strathbraan to visit a daughter residing in Perth. A few days after her arrival at Perth, she developed a mild fever. A heavy fall of snow at this time quite discomposed her; and, when she was told that a heavier fall was expected, her anxiety increased so considerably that she decided to slip away during the night, and make for her home in Strathbraan, some twenty miles off. In the morning the daughter discovered an empty bed. Not until a couple of days afterwards did she learn what had happened. Her mother sent word that she had set out at midnight to trudge home through the snow, and that she did not halt, even to draw breath, until she reached her own threshold. When interrogated later as to what had induced her to set out on so perilous an adventure at her time of life, she responded: "If my sickness had increased, and I had died, they could

not have sent my remains home through the deep snow. If I had told my daughter, maybe she would have locked the room on me, and God forbid that my bones should be at such a distance from home, and be buried among the *Gall na Machair*, among the Strangers of the Plain!"

The singular predilection Highlanders have for their own country, and especially for their place of birth, is shown in the following tale, still told in Perthshire, of an old man who once tenanted a farm at the base of Schiehallion. In his latter years he went to reside with a son, who had taken a farm a goodly distance farther down the country. One morning the old man went out, and was missing for a considerable time. When he returned eventually, he was asked to explain his prolonged absence. "As I was seated by the river," he replied, "the thought came to me that, maybe, some of the waters from Schiehallion, and the sweet fountains that watered the farm of my forefathers, might be passing by me, and that, if I bathed, they might touch my skin. So I stripped; and from the pleasure of being immersed in the pure waters of Schiehallion I could not tear myself away!"

The Ghost-Haunted House of Inverawe.

In July, 1932, Fort Ticonderoga, situated at the junction of Lake George and Lake Champlain, between the States of New York and Vermont, was the scene of an interesting ceremony, when the old French flag with its *fleur-de-lys* waved once more over its ruins, and a bronze tablet in memory of the Marquis de Chartier de Lotbinière, the French engineer who designed the fort, was unveiled by Mme. de Lotbinière, wife of the present head of that family. According to the report of this ceremony in *The Times*, delegations of French Canadians and of officers of the Canadian Black Watch, whose parent regiment suffered so heavily in the first attack on Ticonderoga in 1758, were present, when Major-General Bullard accepted the tablet on behalf of the United States.

Ticonderoga was the scene of one of the fiercest attacks

in which Highland troops hitherto had been engaged. It is maintained that at Ticonderoga they were heavily repulsed, owing to bad generalship. For all that, their valour on this occasion was admitted readily even by the enemy. But in the Scottish Highlands this Red Indian name—*Ticonderoga*—bears another significance, since it is associated with the ghost-haunted House of Inverawe, situated not far from the shores of Loch Etive, in Argyll.

Fort Ticonderoga, which is looked upon as one of the very few ruins of historical interest in the United States, was held by the French under Montcalm. When the British assailed it in 1758, it is said to have been garrisoned by five thousand men. Not only was the fort itself quite impregnable to the instruments of war in use at that time, but, in order to harass the assailants still more, its walls were protected by outer defences in the nature of a breast-work of cut trees and pointed timber—the old-fashioned method of obstructing an advancing enemy, which in times more modern and less civilized is achieved by barbed-wire entanglements. According to contemporaneous accounts, no fewer than two thousand French soldiers manned this breast-work. Although the outer defences might have been destroyed by artillery, General Abercrombie preferred to have them rushed by assault. The 42nd Highlanders, in cutting a way with their broadswords, displayed supreme courage; but very few of them were able to reach the walls of the fort at all. As no ladders had been provided, the soldiers were obliged to climb upon each other's shoulders, and obtain what footing they could in the holes they had made in the face of the fortifications with their swords and bayonets. Immediately a Highlander reached the top of the wall, he was hurled down to his death by its defenders. Nevertheless, Major Duncan Campbell of Inverawe and a few of the men under his command made their way into the fort; but very soon they, too, were numbered with the slain. The losses sustained by the 42nd Highlanders were eight officers, nine sergeants, and two hundred and ninety-seven men killed. The wounded numbered considerably more.

The intrepid Campbell was buried at Fort Edward, where

his grave was marked by a head-stone bearing the following inscription :—

> "Here lyes the body of Duncan Campbell of Inversaw (*sic*), Esq., Major to the old Highland Regiment, aged 56 years, who died 17th July, 1758, of the wounds he received in the attack on the entrenchments of Ticonderoga, or Carillon, 8th July, 1758."

Some sixty-six years ago, when a family of the name of Gilchrist, residing in the neighbourhood, was removing its dead from the old to a new place of burial, it transferred at the same time Duncan Campbell's remains, and also the head-stone, claiming Duncan to have been a blood relation. A friend in America assures me that this head-stone is still carefully preserved.

* * * * * *

And now to the ghosty part of our narrative.

At the fording-place on a river near Barcaldine Castle, in Argyll, marked as it is by five large stepping-stones, Stewart of Appin overtook and slew his adversary, Donald Campbell. Well knowing that the hand of every Campbell in Scotland, and indeed furth of her, now would be against him, Stewart resolved to rely upon the ancient, Highland code of hospitality, whereby an evil-doer—even a murderer—was safe while he remained under his host's roof. Whereupon, he sought refuge at Inverawe House, the home of Campbell of Inverawe. This historic residence has been modernised greatly since those days; but it still has the reputation of being haunted; and the very hall, in which Stewart of Appin threw himself on the mercy of Campbell, still forms part of the original structure.

Highland tradition has it that, during the night, Duncan Campbell of Inverawe was visited by his brother's ghost, who informed him he was sheltering his brother's murderer. Thrice the ghost made his appearance, and endeavoured to move Duncan Campbell to seek revenge on his guest: thrice Duncan Campbell showed himself determined to abide by the traditional code of honour. Like MacGregor of Glen Strae, who had given to the fugitive Lamont his pledge that he would protect him, Campbell could not violate the

traditional code of hospitality, even in such circumstances.

Then, as the warning of the dead, the ghost uttered a strange word never before heard in Inverawe House, nor indeed in all Argyll—*Ticonderoga!*

Some time afterwards, Duncan Campbell of Inverawe joined the 42nd Highlanders or Black Watch. With that regiment he fought in Flanders, and later in America. As the apparition had predicted, he was killed in an attempt to wrest from the French the fort at a place, to which the Red Indians had given the name, *Ticonderoga!*

And now to the extraordinary sequel that is still related in the Highlands.

The very day that Campbell of Inverawe fell, two of his male relatives, father and son, were asleep in the same room, but in different beds, in the old House of Inverawe, when the son awoke to find a figure clad in Highland uniform noiselessly crossing the floor to stoop down over his father's bed. The son was too terrified to speak. So, he put his head under the counterpane, and fell off to sleep again. But a second time he was disturbed by the same vision, silently crossing the floor as before. In the morning he told his father of his uncanny experience. The father seemed little surprised, and explained to his son that the vision he had seen was the ghost of their kinsman, Campbell of Inverawe, who had come to tell them that he and many of his men (he actually mentioned the number!) had just been killed in a great battle in America, and at a place called *Ticonderoga!*

It was several weeks afterwards before the gazette reached his country, confirming the name, Ticonderoga, and enumerating the slain. Anyhow, it now was official that Campbell of Inverawe had fallen at Ticonderoga—precisely where the ghost had predicted to him long before, and under the very circumstances disclosed to his kinsmen who, at the moment of his death, were visited by the apparition that stalked across their bedroom in the old House of Inverawe.

But there was mourning at Inverawe and among the lonely clachans of Argyll long before the gazette appeared.

* * * * * *

Inverawe House is situated on the grass-lands that stretch between the base of Ben Cruachan, on the east, and the shores of Loch Etive, on the north, and away to the west beyond the Gaelic township of Taynuilt. Within earshot of it flows the River Awe, roughly a mile from the point at which it pours the overflow of Loch Awe into the tides of western Argyll. One afternoon in the mid-summer of last year, when searching this romantic countryside with my camera, I arrived at Inverawe House when the bees were bumming noisily in the tall, flowering trees, and the sun-flecked lawn seemed to have taken on the hue of faerie.

"Tell me something about Ticonderoga and the ghost that haunts your home!" I said to the late laird, during a light conversation that took place between us.

"Tell you about Ticonderoga and the ghost?" he responded. "You probably know more about them than *I* do. But I can tell you this. The ghost was seen the other night; and the maids now dread going near the haunted bit of the house where he was seen!"

Where Vegetation will not Grow.

Both in the Highlands and Islands there are innumerable places, said to be haunted, where vegetation will not grow at all, or where only certain weedy vegetation flourishes.

On the Island of Pabbay, in the Sound of Harris, is the ruinous remnant of a stronghold that in ancient times went by a Gaelic name signifying the Old Castle. The large stones lying in the sandy hollow below the ruins are said to be associated with a conflict fought many centuries ago between the MacDonalds and the MacLeods; and the Islanders dwelling in the Sound of Harris aver that grass will never take root just at this spot. Of the history of the Castle, little is known, except that in 1559 the notorious usurper, Iain Dubh, came thither after he had been dislodged from Dunvegan Castle by Tormod MacLeod and his followers, who had succeeded in persuading the warder to surrender the keep to its lawful owner. Iain Dubh managed to escape to his galley, moored in readiness by Dunvegan's walls. He sailed for Pabbay, but on arrival was refused

admittance to the Castle. Fully aware that his life was seriously in danger, he eventually made his way to Ireland. In the same year he was captured by order of one of the O'Donell Chiefs, and put to death in a manner most cruel. Poor Iain Dubh! If ever a man were punished on this earth for his sins, that man was Iain Dubh at the hands of the O'Donells.

The site of the conflict between the MacDonalds and the MacLeods on Pabbay Isle is not the only one on which the Islanders say that grass will never grow. At Luskentyre, on the mainland of Harris, there is the grave of a man who, all his days, had been an inveterate swearer, though they tell me that he was a thoroughly good fellow in other respects. He used to live in a little house at a place called Nisabost, some miles away. One day a friend of mine, when on his way home from Kyles on a wild night with a pony and trap, halted at his house for some refreshment. On setting a plenitude of tea and oatcakes before the sojourner, the occupant stood aside with a large knife in his hand, as if at any moment he might have stabbed his guest in the back. He then delivered himself of one of his favourite Gaelic oaths: "O, Son of the Devil, eat every morsel of that, or I'll stick this knife into you!"

This was the usual manner in which he welcomed storm-stayed friends to Nisabost.

Now, it was prophesied during the lifetime of this man of violent oaths that, because of the blasphemous nature of his tongue, vegetation would never grow on his grave. He was buried at Luskentyre; and, despite several attempts at manuring the surface of the grave, and sowing it with grass seeds, not a blade will spring upon it.

Dockens, Nettles, and Blaeberry.

A tradition very similar is connected with Ardnamurchan. In the burial-ground surrounding the ruined church of former times, on the hillside just behind the Manse at Kilchoan, is a grave screened off by a very high iron railing. It denotes the resting-place of one, MacColl, once tacksman or tenant-farmer of Mingary, who is reputed in western

Argyll to have been largely responsible for many of the evictions from this neighbourhood, more especially from the lands about Coir' a' Mhuilinn and Tor na Monadh, on the slopes of Ben Hiant, about the beginning of the nineteenth century. An old woman, whom he evicted, cursed him with a dreadful curse—that his soul should go down to everlasting perdition, and that proof of its having done so should be that nothing but dockens and nettles could grow upon his grave. And this is so! To-day it is smothered by nettles and dockens.

In the course of time MacColl's family emigrated from Ardnamurchan, some members going to Canada, others to Australia; and at varying intervals certain members of it returned to the grave at Kilchoan to sow grass seeds on it, hoping thus to give the lie to the curse. But never a seed sprouted.

At the eastern end of Loch Pityoulish, in Rothiemurchus, there is an eerie hollow in which no plant will grow except the blaeberry. At this spot, centuries ago, a contingent of Comyns was wiped out by the Shaws, who in very ancient times were overlords of Rothiemurchus. The slain Comyns were interred in this eerie hollow; and on their graves nothing will grow but the plant that is the emblem of their clan—the blaeberry.

While writing of Rothiemurchus, it may be mentioned here that the Doune of Rothiemurchus, like so many old Highland homes, has a ghost and a haunted room, though to me it is one of the least ghosty places I know. Visitors arriving at the Doune, which recently has been converted into an excellent hotel, often enquire for the ghost; and they express the greatest disappointment when they are assured by the management that no member of the staff has ever seen it!

Room 14 is said to be the haunted chamber of the Doune. Many of the natives of Rothiemurchus swear that a ghost occupies that apartment; and, in consequence, several of them won't venture near, after dark. By way of illustrating how prevalent to this day in the Highlands is belief in the existence of ghosts, it may be noted that the management sometimes experiences difficulty in obtaining servants. So,

if you insist on seeing a real, live, Highland ghost, go to the Doune of Rothiemurchus, which is within easy reach of Aviemore, and ask that Room 14 shall be allocated to you!

The Haunted Precipice.

That silver was included among the charms used against evil spirits is shown by the following folk-tale associated with Kintail. The occasion, however, was one on which silver was tried, and found wanting.

Murdoch, one of the sons of Alexander MacRae of Inverinate, met an untimely death. It is recounted round the peat-fires of Kintail that, when hunting in Glen Lic, Murdoch surprised a man driving off his goats. He seized the would-be thief; and it is said that, as he was on the point of leading him away under arrest, so to speak, the thief effected his escape by shoving Murdoch over a precipice known as the Carraig. After a search lasting fifteen days, Murdoch's body was found at the base of the Carraig.

The death of Murdoch occasioned much speculation in Kintail. The notion soon gained currency that the dark deed was the work of some evil spirit. At the spot where the body was found, strange sights were being seen, and even stranger sounds heard—so strange, in truth, that for a generation or two it was deemed highly dangerous to venture near this locality after dark. When snow fell in time of winter, it was discovered that in this neighbourhood the surface, elsewhere smooth and untrodden, exhibited marks as though some creature with rounded feet and long claws had tramped upon it. These marks convinced the people of Kintail that Murdoch had been done to death in a manner most foul, and by some evil agency. Henceforth the Carraig was regarded as haunted in the worst sense.

Now, it was asserted that, if there were a single person in all Kintail who could prevail against the influence of an evil spirit, that person was *Am Breabadair Og,* the Young Weaver, who was known to carry with him wheresoever he went a brace of pistols and a pouchful of silver bullets. Belief in the vulnerability of ghosts, spooks, witches, and

the like to silver bullets was quite prevalent in the Highlands at one time. The weaver was persuaded to betake himself to the Carraig, duly armed, and prepared to challenge and shoot any living things that should happen to cross his path. Nothing occurred on the first night of his vigil, nor on the second. Indeed, neither supernatural sight nor sound disturbed the solitude of the Carraig during the first fourteen nights of the weaver's watch. On the fifteenth night, however (the number of nights corresponding with the number of days during which the folks of Kintail searched for Murdoch's body ere finding it), the weaver returned home, morose and dejected, a defeated man. Never a soul did he tell of what he had heard or seen on the fifteenth night. He simply declined to discuss the incident. But it was obvious from his behaviour that the Carraig was haunted by a spirit too evil even for the Young Weaver and his silver bullets.

"A Piece of Silly Credulity."

The natives of South Uist believed that a valley called Glenslyte, situated between two mountains on the east of that island, was the abode of spirits whom they termed the Great Men, and that all were doomed to incurable madness who did not resign themselves entirely to the wishes of these spirit inhabitants. The utterances whereby ordinary folks surrendered themselves to the guidance of the Great Men consisted of three sentences, in which the glen was named twice. When Martin Martin toured the Hebrides toward the close of the seventeenth century, he remonstrated with the natives for what he described as "a piece of silly credulity"; but they answered him by referring to a recent instance in which a woman entered Glenslyte without previously having placed herself under the control and guidance of the Great Men, with the result that "immediately after she became mad; which confirmed them in their unreasonable fancy." And the Islesfolks dwelling in this glen at shieling-time used to declare that "they sometimes heard a loud noise in the air like men speaking."

Ghost of a Spanish Princess.

Among the many places in Western Argyll that are said to be haunted is the strip of land separating the old burying-ground of Keil, in Morven, from the waters of the Sound of Mull. Both in Mull and in Morven tradition has it that, when the warlike MacLeans sent to the bottom of Tobermory Bay that wandered galleon of the Armada known as the *Florida,* there was a Spanish princess aboard. The princess was one of the many who perished.

Now, it is said that her body was recovered later, and that it was interred at Keil. A year or two ago, I had it from some of the natives of Morven, with whom I have a certain filial association, that, some time after the destruction of King Philip's proud fleet, there came to Morven a Spanish vessel, in order to bear the princess's remains to her native land. During the exhuming of her body, however, some of her finger bones were lost; and at times the ghost of the princess may be seen, as it flits between Keil and the shore of the Sound of Mull, seeking the lost finger bones. And I actually have met folks in Morven, who have encountered this ghost, and who avoid that piece of territory lying between Keil and the Sound of Mull, except in the broadest of daylight.

The Haunted Coffee-house.

If any place in the Hebrides be haunted, that place is Obbe, in South Harris. In the *sruth,* or " stream," of Obbe, not far from the derelict wharves constructed during the *régime* of the late Viscount Leverhulme in his ambition to succeed in Harris where he had been thwarted in Lewis. there is a house that was burned down several years ago, while occupied by a certain Mr Wilson, who was Lord Dunmore's factor in Harris. About fifteen years ago this house was rebuilt by one, Kenneth Campbell, who was the farmer at Rodil at that time. To this day the house is known in the Islands as the coffee-house, since it was erected originally by the late Dowager Countess of Dunmore, with a view to providing coffee and the like for the lobster-

fishermen then engaged in considerable numbers at and around Obbe.

At the coffee-house there was a certain amount of sleeping accommodation for casual travellers.

Now, about twenty-eight years ago, during the tenancy of Mr Wilson, the factor, weird knocking sounds were heard, as of loud hammering in the wall of a bedroom upstairs. This bedroom was occupied by the maids at the time; and the knocking always commenced at midnight. So nervous eventually became the inmates of the coffee-house that they often persuaded the villagers to sit up all night with them. For several weeks this eerie knocking continued without interruption. And it was observed that, when the maids were transferred to another apartment, the knocking followed them. Indeed, the haunted coffee-house at Obbe was proverbial.

There came a day when a trap from the north of Harris arrived unexpectedly at the door of the coffee-house; and one of the maids, to the surprise of the household, went to her mistress and informed her quite casually that she was on the point of leaving for home. As she took her departure, she placed her hand affectionately on her mistress's shoulder, and, alluding to the continual knocking in the wall upstairs each midnight, said: "You're not to be afraid. The knocking has nothing to do with you. It follows me wherever I go."

And, curious to relate, the knocking ceased with the maid's departure.

A year or two later, the coffee-house was destroyed by fire. Everyone regarded it as a haunted place, and avoided it. For years it remained a gaunt ruin, until it was rebuilt by the late Kenneth Campbell, aforenamed.

* * * * * *

Somewhere in Harris there's a haunted glen. They say that in this haunted glen may be heard the conflict of battles long ago, and the tumult and striving of men. And once upon a time a man was found dead in it, with a look of great horror in his eyes, as though he had *witnessed* as well as heard. . . .

CHAPTER XXIII

FOLK-TALES OF THE '15 AND THE '45

IT may be said without fear of serious contradiction that the Risings of 1715 and 1745, culminating as they did in the final overthrow of the Jacobites at Culloden, constitute the only outstanding phase of Scottish history since the arrival of Columba, or of Ninian. The Scottish War of Independence with all its adventures of Wallace and Bruce, the Cromwellian activities north of the Tweed, the Union of the Crowns and, later, of the Parliaments, were all important in their way; but not one of them raised Scotland out of the drab, monotonous succession of minor battles and political intrigues and skirmishes. Bannockburn, it is true, has its peculiar significance for every Scot the world over; but the rout of Edward was of less consequence even to Scotland than Culloden—the last and greatest outburst of Highland chivalry.

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that these attempts to regain a kingdom forfeited, as we know, by crass intolerance and imprudence, should have given rise to a wealth of folk-tale and tradition of a most fascinating nature. So indelible an impression did "the Forty-five" make upon the people of Scotland that to this day it is quite a usual occurrence to come in contact with natives of the Highlands and Islands who speak of Prince Charlie as though they had known him intimately. I, myself, have met many such persons in the Hebrides.

The following is but a selection from the lesser known folk-tales of that period.

HIDDEN TREASURE.

There is a tradition that in the *Feadan Mòr,* or Great Chanter, a gully situated on the west of Sutherland, there lies concealed a hogshead of gold said to have been sent from France to finance the arduous undertaking of the

The Mill Pool at Obbe, South Harris, with Roneval in the background.

Prince Charlie's Country as seen from Druimindarroch at sundown.

[*Facing P* 312

A corner of Loch nan Uamh, in Moidart, where Prince Charlie disembarked from La Doutelle *in July, 1745.*

Prince Charlie's Monument at the head of Loch Shiel, in Glenfinnan, in early springtime.

[*Facing P.* 313

Jacobites during "the Forty-five." The hogshead was consigned to a certain Duncan MacRae. Duncan was endowed with the second-sight; and forby he had the faculty of rendering invisible both persons and objects when he did not wish them to be seen. So as to ensure the safe custody of the hogshead of gold, Duncan and a couple of his confederates conveyed it to the fastnesses of the *Feadan Mòr*. There they buried it, hoping that, if one day Prince Charlie should happen to find himself in this part of Sutherland, it might be of service to him.

But Prince Charlie never came this way. And, so, to this day, they say in the north of Scotland, the hogshead of gold lies buried in the *Feadan Mòr*.

Now, Duncan put a spell on the hogshead—a spell that made it invisible to the human eye except for a brief moment once in seven years.

Somewhere about 1845—just a century after Duncan had concealed this treasure—a crofter woman sat watching her cows, as they grazed in the vicinity of the *Feadan Mòr*. As she sat, she spun; and, as she spun, she suddenly noticed by her side part of a hogshead projecting from the ground. Believing that at long last the buried treasure of "the Forty-five" had become visible once more, she drove her distaff into the ground beside the hogshead, in order the more readily to identify the position, and then hastened to her native village to inform the neighbours of her discovery. In great excitement the villagers now followed her to the *Feadan Mòr*. But on returning there with them, she could locate neither the hogshead nor her distaff. Both had vanished, for, though Duncan MacRae had been dead long since, his power of rendering things invisible still pervaded the *Feadan Mòr*, and maintained the hogshead under spell.

And, so, to this day the treasure sent from France to assist the cause of a hapless Prince lies among the wilds of Sutherland.

Treasure in Coire Scamadale.

At Scamadale, on Loch Hourn, is the site of the home in which, it is said, lived one of the Seven Strong Men of

Scotland at the time of "the Fifteen." This particular warrior, when on the point of leaving his home for Sheriffmuir, buried all his treasure in a corrie above Scamadale known as Coire Scamadale. The precise position of the treasure could be located only by the light of the moon when visible from a certain spot. This warrior's name was Rory Mòr. At Sheriffmuir he was a casualty; and so his treasure still lies hidden in Coire Scamadale.

A native of the district, who now resides by the shores of Loch Nevis, the fiord to the south of Loch Hourn, is known to have spent many moonlight nights in search of this treasure. It is told of this man that, when chasing a hind in the corrie one day, his foot touched a spot at which it seemed as though the treasure lay, judging by the jingling sound he heard. But he was too intent at the time in pursuing his quarry, and thought now that in any case he could identify the spot with ease. The hind got away from him; and, when he endeavoured to return to the spot where he thought his foot had disturbed the treasure of Rory Mòr, he could not find it. Never before was man more regretful that he had not let the hind go her own way earlier in the chase.

On the last day of 1935, I sailed up Loch Nevis with the mail-boat from Mallaig. Among the secluded places by the shore at which we called was Camusrory, where a small boat came out to meet us, rowed by the official postman of this remote and scattered township. When we had handed to the boatman the New Year mails and odds and ends of merchandise, and had taken from him such outward mails as he had to give us, I learnt that his name was John MacPherson, and that this was the very man who, while living near Scamadale, used to search the corrie for Rory Mòr's treasure.

Kegs of Gold Coin.

There are few matters upon which the opinions of authorities differ so widely and so violently as on matters of history. It has been disputed, for example, as to where

Prince Charlie landed when first he arrived in Scotland. Even the story of his having set foot first on Eriskay, and of his having planted there the seeds of the convolvulus since known as " the Prince's Flower," has been challenged. The following folk-tale, current in Colonsay, would seem to suggest that he may have disembarked there. In any case, though the Eriskay version is the more generally accepted, and also the more probable, I narrate this folk-tale for what is may be worth.

About the end of July, 1745—so tradition in Colonsay has it—there anchored near Eilean Olamsay, a small island situated off the east coast of Colonsay and between two and three miles north of Scalasaig, a foreign vessel, the name of which the islanders were unable to ascertain at the time, because of the distance of her anchorage from the shore. That those aboard were acting with great caution is shown by the fact that, before plans for disembarkation were discussed, an officer was sent ashore early in the day in order to discover from Donald MacNeill, Chief of the MacNeills of Colonsay, whether he and his clansmen were favourably disposed toward Prince Charlie. The Chief gave the officer a somewhat mixed reception when he learnt that the Prince himself was aboard, that it was proposed to land on Eilean Olamsay treasure for the financing of an enterprise to recover the throne from the Hanoverians, and that it was suggested MacNeill himself might accept responsibility for the safe custody of the treasure.

The Chief would have nothing whatever to do with the project; and the only explanation the officer could give for his assuming that he would have been ready to lend what aid he could was that in France it had been held that such treasure could always be left with complete confidence in the keeping of people living where heather grew. When the officer returned to his ship to report the unfavourable attitude of MacNeill, the Prince and several of his officers decided to land on Colonsay, and visit MacNeill in person at Kiloran House, where he resided with his brother, Archibald. At Kiloran they were received politely; but the Prince, for all his winning ways, was totally unable to persuade the MacNeills to assist in the direction desired.

They were adamant. Archibald expressed the view that, in any case, Eilean Olamsay, or even Colonsay for that matter, was too small an island on which to store treasure with any degree of certainty that it would not be found. And, when this argument was rebuffed by the Jacobite officers, he simply informed them frankly that the sympathies of his family and of the Islanders generally were with the Hanoverians, and that the MacNeills always supported the policy adopted by the Clan Campbell.

As a gentle hint of a bribe, Prince Charlie and his officers now proceeded to explain that the treasure aforementioned consisted of gold coins packed in small kegs. However, even this had no effect, since the MacNeills of Colonsay appeared determined not to compromise themselves in any degree.

When the Prince realised that further persuasion was useless, he asked MacNeill whether he could put him in touch with a couple of reliable pilots, since his seamen were anything but well versed in the navigation problems of the Western Highlands and Hebrides. To this MacNeill responded that, while he knew of several skilled pilots on Colonsay, he doubted whether any one of them would go with him, if he jaloused the object of his visit to these shores.

The news soon got abroad on Colonsay that the Prince was wanting two pilots, with the result that several seamen presented themselves for service. It was soon found, however, that negotiations with these applicants were impracticable—nay, utterly impossible. When the day was wearing to a close, and the Prince's officers were beginning to get a little anxious about the ship's anchorage for the night, they succeeded in persuading two brothers named MacMillan to enter the Prince's service. After great argument and bargaining, the MacMillans consented to act in the capacity of pilots, in return for a keg of gold each. But even now matters were not settled: a further hitch arose when the MacMillans declined the Prince's promise that they would be given the kegs whenever they had rendered the service desired of them. Since they were resolved not to serve on any other condition, and the Prince

now felt himself entirely at their mercy, they were given a keg of gold each, prior to their embarking.

As it was the intention to quit Colonsay waters that evening, the newly found pilots returned home to make the necessary arrangements before sailing. The kegs they committed to the custody of their relatives on the Island. But so much valuable time had been wasted in arguing and in dilly-dallying that, when eventually the MacMillan brothers did join the ship, it was deemed too late to sail that night. Before dawn, however, the younger brother, Hector to name, became increasingly suspicious about the whole undertaking. So, under cover of darkness he secretly made for the shore—whether by small boat or by swimming, no one ever quite knew. But what everyone did know was that Hector had broken his agreement with the Prince, had managed to get ashore somehow, and had retained his keg of gold coin. He is said to have prospered thereafter; and his descendants are respectable inhabitants of Colonsay at this day.

The other brother, whose name is said to have been Iain MacMillan, acted more faithfully. He remained a pilot in the Prince's service until the latter finally escaped to France. Iain liked the French; and the French liked Iain. He is believed to have remained in their employ, and to have married a Frenchwoman. It is said that he died at Dunkirk, where he had settled down some years previously. Throughout his sojourn in France he maintained a regular correspondence with his kinsfolk on Colonsay; but he never re-visited his native island—not even to claim his keg of gold coin.

The old folks of Colonsay believe the foregoing story to be perfectly true in every detail. They admit that in 1745 the Prince received little encouragement at the hands of their Chief—though, curiously, when the same MacNeill received a summons toward the end of the Rebellion to despatch as many recruits as possible for the Hanoverian army, great difficulty was experienced in inducing any of the islanders of military age to take up arms against Prince Charlie.

Be that as it may, the Colonsay folks still believe that it

was on *their* Island that the luckless Charlie first set foot on the ancient Kingdom lost to him by the imprudence of his ancestors.

Little Alan at Sheriffmuir.

Belief that a sian (*seun*) or charm protected one against harm or injury was very prevalent in the Highlands and Islands during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; and innumerable folk-tales are told of the manner in which men were "sianed" or "charmed" when on their way to fight for the Stuarts during the '15 and '45. When, during the Rising of 1715, Alan MacDonald of Clan Ranald was on the point of leaving South Uist to join the Earl of Mar and the Highlanders at Perth, an old woman put a charm on him. And this charm would have shielded Little Alan (as Clan Ranald was called) from all scaith, had he not incurred her displeasure by insisting upon taking away with him a young lad from the clachan of Stoneybridge, contrary to the wish of his widowed mother. In vain the widow implored Clan Ranald to leave the lad behind; and so she vowed that Clan Ranald would never return from the wars. Hastily she baked two bannocks, a big one and a little one. And she asked her son which he would have—the big one with his mother's curse, or the little one with her blessing. The lad chose the little one, with the blessing.

The widow gave her son the little bannock and her blessing, and also a bent sixpence—

"Here is a crooked sixpence, seven times cursed, my son!" she said. "Let it avail thee in battle against Little Alan, and thus merit thy mother's blessing, for otherwise you will be having her curse upon you."

And so the lad accompanied Little Alan of Clan Ranald to Sheriffmuir, against his mother's wish.

At the outset of the battle the bullets were showering down like hail upon Little Alan, and making no impression on him. And they say, too, that, for every blow he received from the enemy, he retaliated with ten. When the battle raged most fiercely, and neither the Hanoverians nor the Jacobites seemed to be gaining any advantage, the widow's

son remembered the crooked sixpence seven times cursed, and the warning of his mother that it was better he should depart with her blessing than with her curse. So he placed the crooked sixpence in his flint-lock, and fired at Little Alan of Clan Ranald, who fell dead. And the clansmen gathered round their fallen hero, weeping and wailing so bitterly that Glengarry had to cry out to them in the Gaelic: "To-day for *revenge: to-morrow* for weeping!" Thereupon the MacDonalds resumed the fight with renewed vigour, and hewed down the Hanoverian troops under the command of Argyll.

"He who was a man but yesterday," was the retort of Clan Ranald's foster-father, when asked for whom he was lamenting, since the news of Little Alan's death had travelled swiftly across Scotland to the Isles.

A few days prior to Clan Ranald's leaving South Uist for Sheriffmuir, Lady Clan Ranald had a strange premonition that some dire calamity was going to befall her home at Ormacleit. It had taken Clan Ranald seven years to build the house at Ormacleit with the aid of a French architect, French masons, and French freestone. Seven years, and not a day longer, it was occupied. On the night of the battle, and the blood of Clan Ranald himself barely cold on the heath of Sheriffmuir, it was burned to the ground through the kitchen chimney's having caught fire.

The Silver Shoe of Locheil.

Faith in the protective and curative power[1] of silver persists in the Highlands and Islands to this very day; and

[1] The belief that the seventh son, or the seventh son of a seventh son, has the power of curing certain diseases is still held in many districts of the Highlands and Islands. My own cousins, for example, who live within a mile or so of the town of Stornoway, in the Outer Hebrides, firmly believe that the power of healing "the king's evil" (scrofula) is vested in a seventh son. Morning and evening, for three consecutive days, the seventh son must bathe the wound of his patient. On the evening of the third day, he must pierce a hole in an old sixpence, and hang it by a thread of green wool round the patient's neck. The wound begins to heal, it is said, immediately the green thread breaks unbeknown to the sufferer.

Dr. Norman Morrison, a well-known Lewis scholar and naturalist now residing at Campbeltown, has in his possession an old sixpence that was used in Lewis as recently as 1928 to cure "the king's evil."

folk-tales are related among the remote corners of Locheil's Country of how the Silver Shoe came into the possession of the ancient and valiant family of Locheil, and of how the retention of this heirloom ensured both the safety and the prowess of successive chiefs.

According to tradition, Cameron of Locheil obtained the Silver Shoe by his performing the old and gruesome mode of divination known throughout Celtic Scotland as the *Taghairm*.[1] Moreover, no member nor follower of the Clan Cameron placed any reliance in the courage or leadership in battle of a chief or of his heir, except when the Silver Shoe was known to have fitted his left foot in infancy. When a son was born to Locheil, it was customary, immediately after he had been christened, to submit him to the test of the Silver Shoe.

The record of the Clan Cameron for chivalry and bravery during the '15 and the '45 is unsurpassed by that of *any* clan; but it is still whispered in the remote Highland glens that the Cameron who, at Sheriffmuir, turned and fled from the enemy, had entered the world with the misfortune of a left foot too large for the Silver Shoe.

What ultimately became of the Silver Shoe of Locheil is not known. Some say that it was destroyed when, in the year, 1745, fire consumed the home of " the Gentle Locheil," one of the most lovable of all Prince Charlie's adherents.

MacLeod of Berneray at Culloden.

The story is still told in the Outer Hebrides of the charm put by a Skye-woman on MacLeod of Berneray, when he was on the point of leaving to join Prince Charlie at Culloden. Eye-witnesses declared on their return from the fateful field that, although the bullets rained heavily on MacLeod, they had not the slightest effect on him.

When the battle was lost, and the remnants of the clans dispersed to such safety as nature offered, MacLeod flung

[1] *Taghairm* was the ancient mode of divination, practised throughout Celtic Scotland, in which a man was wrapped in a fresh bullock's hide, and left by a stream to wait for inspiration. (See Sir Walter Scott's " Notes " to *The Lady of the Lake*.)

off his coat in order to be less impeded in his flight from Cumberland's troops. And it is said that the coat was picked up by his foster-brother, Murdoch MacAskill to name, who was following closely behind. On gaining some degree of safety, MacAskill examined the coat more carefully, and found it to have been riddled by bullet-holes. But not one of the bullets had left any mark on MacLeod of Berneray, which proved the efficacy of the charm put upon him by the Skye-woman.

MacDougall of Dunollie and the '45.

The stories of the '15 and of the '45 are not all of Jacobites being sent off with blessings to the wars, however. The MacDougalls of Lorne had suffered severely as the result of their participation in the '15. Iain Ciar MacDougall, the Chief at the time, had quitted his Castle of Dunollie to join the Earl of Mar on behalf of King James, the Old Chevalier; and his performance at Sheriffmuir necessitated his going into hiding for a dozen years or so, and resulted in the forfeiture of his estates. Not until 1727 did he receive the king's pardon. With these misfortunes still fresh in their memories, the MacDougalls abstained from taking part in the '45; and there is a tradition in Argyll that, in order to ensure that the next chief did not actively espouse the cause of Prince Charlie, his wife spilt a basin of boiling water on his foot, thereby incapacitating him for the time being!

Charmed Stones.

Throughout the Highlands and Islands in olden times there were several stones that effected miraculous cures, or that put a *seun* or spell on anyone about to face danger or the rigours of a long journey. Even to this day belief survives in the occult properties of such charmed stones.

The Campbells of Ardvorlich owned a charmed stone, which was known throughout Perthshire as the Red Stone of Ardvorlich. This stone was most efficacious in curing ailing cattle or sheep; but it also won a reputation for

relieving human distempers—a veritable panacea for man and beast! The cure was ensured by the drinking of water in which the *Clach Dearg,* or Red Stone, had been dipped.

It is related, too, that Sir Colin Campbell, who is commonly known in Highland history as the Black Knight of Rhodes, and who, in the wars against the Saracens, fought with the Crusaders, carried a charmed stone on his person throughout the campaign.

In an inventory of jewels preserved in the seventeenth century at Taymouth Castle, in fair Breadalbain, this charmed stone is described as " Ane stone of the quantitye of half a hen's eg set in silver."

It was during Sir Colin's absence about the year, 1440, that his wife is said to have built the Castle of Kilchurn, on Loch Awe. The Black Knight's return to Scotland was despaired of—so long had he been away at the wars! His wife, sorely beset with divers suitors, as was Penelope in Classical times, ultimately consented to marry one of them. In Argyll the story is still recounted of how Sir Colin, now visited by a dream, hastened home from the Holy Land, and presented himself at the portal of Kilchurn in the guise of a medicant, just in time to interrupt the ceremony about to be solemnised.

In Glen Lyon House, whence, it is said, the Campbells of Glen Lyon set out for Glen Coe preparatory to the massacre of the MacIans, there used to be a stone that guaranteed the safe return from conflict of all who previously had been sprinkled with a few drops of the water in which the stone had been immersed. Tradition in Perthshire asserts that, before setting out for Glen Coe, Colin Campbell of Glen Lyon and his men were thus baptised.

Now, the last occasion on which the protecting influence of this stone is believed to have been sought was when the men of Glen Lyon left their homes to be with Prince Charlie at the raising of the Jacobite Standard by the head of Loch Shiel on August, 19th, 1745. Of those who visited Glen Lyon House, all returned unscaithed from Culloden with the exception of one of their number, who ridiculed the belief in the stone, and who succumbed to his wounds on the field of battle.

Clan Ranald's Faery Chanter.

In the house on the Isle of Shona Bheag, in Moidart, are many relics associated with Prince Charlie and the '45; and among them is the remnant of an ancient set of pipes said to have been given long ago to MacDonald of Kinloch Moidart by one of the last of the MacIntyres, who were hereditary pipers to the Clan Ranald. Tradition maintains that these pipes were played at the Battle of Bannockburn, and also as the clans rallied to the Prince's banner at Glenfinnan, more than four centuries later.

Now, the chanter of these pipes has a hole in it in addition to the number requisite to the usual chanter scale. This extra hole is known as the faery hole, since it is said to have been made by a faery, the guardian spirit of the family, who declared that it would enable the player to produce on his pipes music the like of which had never been heard either in Moidart or furth of it.

General Wade at Rothiemurchus.

When George Wade, the Hanoverian general, was engaged in those road-making enterprises for which he became so well known in the Highlands after "the Fifteen," he frequently made his way to the Doune of Rothiemurchus, where Patrick Grant, the laird of the time, who went by the name of MacAlpine, dispensed hospitality and geniality in measure unbounded. But even the Laird of Rothiemurchus, for all his generosity, came to the view that it was possible to have too much even of a good thing—so constant and insistent had Wade's visits become. And, so, despite his strong Hanoverian sympathies, he resolved at length to give his unsolicited guest a hint so broad as to ensure that not merely would he see it, but that he would take it.

One night, as the General and MacAlpine sat late over the dying embers, and the former exhibited no indication of his departing, the Laird of Rothiemurchus gave a whimsical thought to the exiled King James the Eighth. Having assured himself that the entire household was abed, he stealthily turned the key in the door, and announced to the General from behind a pistol that he believed their friend-

ship could stand the test of a toast to which neither of them had ever been accustomed. Thereupon the Laird rose and toasted " The King ! " and in so doing passed his wine-glass over the water decanter.

In silent indignation, Wade quitted the Doune; and never again did he cast his shadow on MacAlpine's threshold.

The Prince and the Beatons.

Few localities of the British Isles are richer in memories and folk-tales of the '45 than the Isle of Skye, as might be expected of an island that sheltered Prince Charlie during so considerable a period of his wanderings. While crossing a moor on the outskirts of Balmeanach, in Bracadale, the Prince and Flora MacDonald and a guide met a certain Beaton and his young wife, who were driving home their cows to be milked. After the exchange of befitting salutations, the Beatons realised that the spokesman of the party was a *duin' uasal*—a man of gentle birth. As conversation progressed, the Beatons, who to begin with were a little embarrassed, became more at ease, and insisted that the three wanderers should accept a drink of milk. They could not but observe that two of the strangers were taking great care of the third—a young man who spoke little, and appeared to be anxious. Beaton and his wife became more than curious when they noticed that, although these two drank the milk from the little, wooden drinking-dish known in the Highlands as a *cuman*, they took care that their charge drank from a golden cup they carried with them.

When the strangers moved off, the spokesman lingered behind for a moment to speak with the Beatons, and gave them three pieces of gold as mementoes of a memorable meeting. Greatly moved were the Beatons when they realised that they had entertained none other than the young Prince of Scotland. After the lapse of some months, the goodwife of Balmeanach gave birth to a daughter, who was as unlike her parents as any child could have been, and who grew up to be the loveliest lass in all Bracadale. The child became known throughout Skye as *Mairi a' Phrionnsa*, Mary of the Prince, as though she had been begotten of

him, since the Islesfolk insisted that her resemblance to the Prince was due to the impression he had made on her mother, when the latter realised that one of the strangers, to whom she had given milk, was the fugitive Prince Charlie.

To this day the byname of *Mairi a' Phrionnsa* is applied in a jocular manner to the descendants of these Beatons; but, as the late Miss Frances Tolmie assured me some years ago, the singular beauty of Mairi has not been transmitted to her posterity.

The Appin Dirk.

In Argyll there is a queer story told of the Appin dirk and its association with Culloden. Somewhere about the month of June, in the fateful year, 1746, a band of Red Coats, while on its way to Inveraray through Appin, pillaged and plundered as it went. In moving through the Strath of Appin one evening, one of the band noticed a young woman milking her cows in a field by the roadside. Without either explanation or provocation, the sergeant in charge leapt over the dyke, and shot a cow dead. He then directed his attention to the young woman, who defended herself with great wit and courage. As she was forced to retreat toward the Appin shore, she picked up a stone. This she hurled at the sergeant with such force and accuracy that it stunned him, thus allowing her to escape to a boat afloat by the water-line. She rowed out to an island for safety; and there she remained until she felt herself free to return, and not likely to incur any further danger at the hands of the Red Coats. This heroine's name is given in Appin as Julia MacColl.

The stunned sergeant was soon picked up by his men, and conveyed to a place of halt for the night. By morning he had succumbed to the wound inflicted by the stone thrown by Julia MacColl. His corpse was interred in the old churchyard at Airds. But the men of Appin decided that his body could not be allowed to remain there a moment longer than could be helped. So, when the Red Coats had gone their way, they exhumed the body of the sergeant, and flung it into the sea—but not before Julia MacColl's brother

had flayed the right arm of it with a view to making from the skin a dirk-sheath. When this self-same dirk-sheath was seen by the Rev. Alexander Stewart (known throughout the Highlands and Islands as "Nether Lochaber," his pseudonym), it was dark brown in colour, limp and soft to the touch, and bore no ornamentation except a small piece of brass at the point, and a thin edging of brass round the opening, on which were inscribed the date, 1747, and the initials, D.C.M. It is nearly seventy years since Dr. Stewart handled this grim relic of "the Forty-five." There is no trace of it in Appin to-day. But some years ago a number of MacColls emigrated from these parts to New Zealand; and among them were two or three Julias. And so it is thought that the dirk and sheath may now be in the keeping of Julia MacColl's descendants at the other side of the earth. If this be the case, they form an interesting, though gruesome, link with Appin and "the Forty-five."

A Pedlar's Fate.

Several well-known traditions and folk-tales associated with Prince Charlie are still recounted by the older inhabitants of Glen Moriston. The story is told of a pedlar who, in passing through the glen, was shot dead by a band of soldiers who took him to be the Prince—so strongly did he resemble the latter in facial expression. No explanation is forthcoming as to why they took the pedlar's life when they could have taken him alive with the greatest ease, if they seriously thought him to be Prince Charlie. The officer in charge immediately had the pedlar's head cut off. With this head he proceeded triumphantly to the Duke of Cumberland, who at the time was at Fort Augustus. Perhaps he expected to receive the substantial reward offered for Charlie, dead or alive!

The story continues that Cumberland exhibited the head to a number of Jacobite prisoners then incarcerated at Fort Augustus, and enquired of them whether they recognised it to be the head of their Prince. "It is, indeed!" they murmured, hoping that in so doing they might be giving to the fugitive some brief respite from pursuit.

The spot in Glen Moriston, at which the innocent pedlar met his death, is marked by a cairn.

The Seven Men of Glen Moriston.

After the rout of the clans at Culloden, a small band of Glen Moriston men, whose homes had been razed because of their allegiance to the Stuarts, took upon themselves the vow that never would they conclude their peace with the House of Hanover. And they took up their abode in a cave on the hillside, a goodly way up the glen. Here they lived the lives of outlaws, spending as much of their time as possible in harrying the Red Coats and their dependants. For a while Prince Charlie rested with these men during one of his flights; and it was while the Prince sojourned with them in this cave that he had occasion to reprimand them for their swearing and cursing.

Nearly two hundred years have passed by since Charlie came this way; but even to this day tales are told of the Seven Men of Glen Moriston. Their number consisted of three Chisholms, two MacDonalds, one MacGregor, and one Grant. These men had banded themselves together into "a small association of offence and defence against the Duke of Cumberland and his army (he and the Laird of Grant having betrayed so many of their countrymen upon giving up their arms) never to yield but to die on the spot, never to give up their arms, and that for all the days of their lives."

The Seven Men of Glen Moriston confined their attention not merely to harassing or killing any Red Coats that came their way, but also to inflicting summary vengeance upon any Highlander whom they believed to have been guilty of conspiring with the enemy. And it was to the custody of these dauntless fellows that MacDonald of Glenaladale committed Prince Charlie at a later stage in his wanderings. One of the Seven Men soon recognised their charge. His name was John MacDonald. "At the sight of him the poor man changed colours," says Iain Og of Borrodale of John MacDonald, "and turned as red as blood, and addressed him in the following manner: 'I am sorry to see you in such a poor state, and hope if I live to see you yet in a

better condition, as I have seen you before at the head of your army, upon the green of Glasgow: all I can do is to continue faithful to you while I live, and I am willing to leave my wife and children and follow you wherever you incline going.'"

The Vindictive Seaforth.

Let me draw this volume to a close with a brief folk-tale associated with the sandy foreshore at Barrisdale, on Loch Hourn, that used to be renowned for its oyster-beds.

At the time of the Rising, one of the MacKenzies of Seaforth, who is said to have exercised suzerainty over this part of Knoydart, frequently toured his domain in search of young men of military age, and capable of bearing arms. There lived at Barrisdale at this time an agéd widow, from whom he already had taken seven sons to fight in his wars and feuds. All these sons were killed eventually. When next Seaforth visited this district, the widow reproached him for his having robbed her of everything she had in life, but challenged him to deprive her of that stretch of the foreshore so rich in oysters and other shell-fish, from which she derived much of her diet. Local lore has it that, in retaliation for this rebuke, Seaforth directed a number of his men to proceed to the foreshore with ploughs, to turn up and destroy the oyster-beds; but it is said that, despite Seaforth's vindictiveness, the widow survived at Barrisdale for many a day.

She used to mention that the three most dreadful experiences of her life were the cold fog of November, the frost that comes in May, and the sight of the vindictive Seaforth.

During the feuds that obsessed the Highlanders in olden times, it was no unusual occurrence for one clan to seek revenge on a neighbouring clan by ploughing up or otherwise destroying beaches noted for their abundance of shell-fish. There is a tradition in the Parish of the Small Isles that a band of men, hostile to the MacDonalds of Clan Ranald, thus devastated the shell-fish beach fringing the Singing Sands of Laig Bay, in the Isle of Eigg.

GLOSSARY

BIRLINN: the galley or barge of a West Highland or Hebridean chieftain.
BOTHY: a hut or shack.
BOURACH: a hut of loose stones; a shepherd's hut.
BOWMAN: cattleman.
BRAW: fine, gaily dressed, handsome.
BRIEVE: a judge or law-giver; a brehon.
BRUGH: the dwelling of faeries, usually in the shape of a green mound.
BRUITED: noised, rumoured.

CEILIDH: a social gathering, usually assembled round the peat-fire, for the telling of tales and the singing of songs.
CHIEL: a fellow, a man.
COGGIE: a small, wooden bowl.
COUTHIE: kind, gentle, affable.
CRAGGAN: a jar or pitcher.
CRATUR: creature.
CRUISIE: a small iron lamp with a handle, and a crucible for holding oil.
CUDDY: young coal-fish; saithe.
CURRAGH: a small boat; a coracle.

DEAVED: deafened.
DOCKEN: a dock, a troublesome weed having long leaves and long tap-roots.
DOOL: sorrow, grief, misfortune.
DOVERING: drowsing, half-asleep.
DREICH: dreary, dull, wearisome.

FLAIL: an implement for threshing corn, consisting of a wooden bar (the *swingle*) hinged or tied to a handle.
FLITTING: removing from one house to another.
FORBY: besides, in addition, furthermore.

GALORE: abundance, plenty.
GEASA: spell; enchantment.
GLEBE: the land belonging to or attached to a parish manse.

HAVER: to talk at random, nonsensically, incoherently, whimsically.

JALOUSED: suspected, guessed.

KEBBUCK: a whole cheese.
KEEKING: peeping.
KIST: a wooden chest or box; sometimes a coffin.
KNOWE: a knoll or mound.
KYLE: a strait or narrows.

LEAL: loyal.

MACHAR: an extensive, bent-grown tract; the low-lying and sometimes swampy lands near the shore, affording a certain amount of pasturage for live-stock.
"MAK SICCAR": make surer.
MOOLS: the grave; the earth of a grave; dust.

QUERN: a stone hand-mill for grinding grain.

RIEVING: plundering, raiding, roving.
ROWTING: bellowing.
RUNE: a secret or mystery; a cryptic rhyme or saying; a fragment of ancient lore or poetry, usually having a mystic significance.

SASSENACH: a term habitually applied by Highlanders to Lowlanders, often contemptuously; an Englishman.
SCART: cormorant.
SEANNACHIE: a story-teller; historian of a clan.
SHIELING: the shelter or hut in which shepherds, drovers, and others dwell when the cattle are herded to the hills for summer grazing.
SKELP: a smack given with the hand.
SKOYLING: squealing.
SOUGH: the noise of wind; a rumour.
SPIRTLE: a wooden stick such as is used to stir porridge or broth.
SPREAGH: plunder; booty, usually in the form of cattle.

TACKSMAN: a lease-holder or tenant farmer.
TEEM: to pour; to unload as a cart.
TINCHEL: a circle of men engaged for the purpose of closing in round a herd of deer.
TOOM: empty, lean, bare.
TRYST: an appointment to meet; a rendezvous; a fixed market or fair.

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